THE NEW
# SUNDAY EXPRESS

BENGALURU • SUNDAY • JANUARY 09, 2022 • ₹12.00 • PAGES 24 • LATE CITY EDITION

**JAB-O-METER**
TAKE YOUR SHOT
Jan 7 **81,50,982 doses**
Jan 8 **79,68,523 doses**
TOTAL: 1,51,47,41,090

| NATIONWIDE | JAN 7 | JAN 8 |
|---|---|---|
| Fresh cases | 1,17,100 | 1,41,986 |
| Recoveries | 30,836 | 40,895 |
| Deaths | 302 | 285 |

| KARNATAKA | JAN 7 | JAN 8 |
|---|---|---|
| Fresh cases | 8,449 | 8,906 |
| Recoveries | 505 | 508 |
| Deaths | 4 | 4 |

## *EXPERT BODY LOOKS TO TAILOR VAX FOR OMICRON*

**The NTAGI panel is discussing the possibility of restructuring existing jabs to make them more potent against new variant**

### REDESIGN TO REDUCE TRANSMISSION RATES

Current jabs appear largely ineffective against preventing Omicron infection, though hospitalisations are lower now. "We want to push firms to redesign vaccines so that they are better suited against Omicron and to reduce transmission rates," said N K Arora, head of Covid Working Group of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI)

### EFFICACY RESULTS NOT OUT YET

- Global firms such as Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna have conceded that even three vaccine doses may not be able to curb rapid spread of the highly transmissible variant
- No results available yet on efficacy of Covishield and Covaxin against Omicron, and on whether three doses will help | P8

### COVAXIN

CAN BE EASILY SUBJECTED TO REDESIGN EXPERIMENT, NTAGI SOURCES SAID

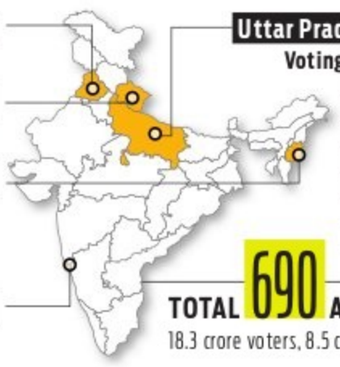
CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

**Punjab: 117 seats**
Single-phase voting on Feb 14

**Uttarakhand: 70 seats**
Single-phase voting on Feb 14

**Manipur: 60 seats**
Voting in two phases
- Feb 27 (38 seats)
- Mar 3 (22 seats)

**Goa: 40 seats**
Single-phase voting on Feb 14



**Uttar Pradesh: 403 seats**
Voting in seven phases
- Feb 10 (58 seats)
- Feb 14 (55 seats)
- Feb 20 (59 seats)
- Feb 23 (60 seats)
- Feb 27 (60 seats)
- Mar 3 (57 seats)
- Mar 7 (54 seats)

**TOTAL 690 ASSEMBLY SEATS**
18.3 crore voters, 8.5 crore of them women

**COUNTING DAY: MARCH 10**

**Dos and don'ts**
- Campaign curfew between 8 pm and 8 am
- No victory celebration allowed
- Not more than 5 people, including candidate, can do door-to-door campaigns
- Parties told to adopt virtual campaigning
- Online nomination option for candidates
- Polling time increased by 1 hour
- Covid booster dose must for poll officials

**'CRIMINAL' CANDIDATES**
Parties fielding candidates with pending criminal cases must upload their full details on their websites. Parties will also have to give a reason for selecting such candidates

# SEVEN-PHASE POLLS FROM FEB 10

No rallies, public meetings in five poll-bound states till Jan 15; parties asked to do virtual campaigns; voting in UP spread across all 7 phases; CEC vows to make polls 'Covid-safe'

**KUMAR VIKRAM** @ New Delhi

ON a day when the country saw nearly 1.5 lakh fresh Covid-19 cases, the Election Commission announced the poll schedule for Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur but in a first-of-its-kind move, all physical rallies, road shows and public meetings have been banned till January 15 owing to the ongoing pandemic. The Commission on Saturday said it would review its decision as the "ground situation is dynamic". It also urged political parties and candidates to hold virtual rallies.

While the first phase of polling will begin on February 10, the last phase will be held on March 3 and the results will be declared on March 10. Uttar Pradesh will see seven-phase voting between February 10 and March 7. In Manipur, polling will be in two phases, while Punjab, Goa and Uttarakhand will have a single-phase election (see graphic).

Explaining the decision to go ahead with polls amid the spike in Covid cases, Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra said holding timely elections is the "essence of maintaining democratic governance". The CEC said the decision was taken after detailed discussions with the Union health secretary, home secretary, experts and health secretaries of the poll-bound states. He said the elections would focus on Covid safety measures to ensure maximum participation.

Chandra asserted that vaccination rates in the five states had improved significantly during the last week. The CEC also said it was incorrect to link polls with the rise in coronavirus cases, citing the examples of Maharashtra and Delhi, which recorded a high number of cases even when there were no elections.

So far, 53% of the eligible population has been fully vaccinated in UP but the level is lower at 44% in Manipur and Punjab. In Goa and Uttarakhand, the double vaccination level is high at 96% and 83% respectively.

The EC had faced flak during the West Bengal polls in April 2021 as Covid-19 numbers dramatically rose during the second wave. It banned road shows only in the last two phases of the elections. P7

> **Candidates should conduct their campaign through virtual mode as much as possible. There will be no *nukkad sabhas* (neighbourhood meetings) on public roads and no victory procession after counting**
>
> Sushil Chandra, Chief Election Commissioner

# 10 city wards behind state Covid surge

**CHETANA BELAGERE** @ Bengaluru

TEN wards have turned Bengaluru into an epicentre of Covid cases in the state over the last seven days.

With 83.5 per cent of active cases in the state, the city's positivity rate rose to 10.53 per cent on Saturday. Of the state's total of 38,507 active cases, the city has 32,157. To the 8,906 cases added in the state on Sunday, Bengaluru contributed 7,113.

Data from the state Covid-19 war room shows that Bellandur, Varthur, Begur, HSR Layout, Hagadur, Doddanekkundi, New Tippasandra, Koramangala, Horamavu and Shantala Nagar wards are reporting the highest number of cases in the city, triggering the surge.

The data showed that the city reported only 1,396 cases from December 25 to 31, but added a whopping 24,281 cases between January 1 and 7. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has demarcated the wards into six levels based on the total number of active cases. While Level 1 indicates 0-10 cases, Level 2 with 10-25 cases, Level 3 with 25 -50 cases, Level 4 with 50-100 cases, Level 5 with 100-300 cases and Level 6 with over 300 cases. P3

# Mekedatu Yatra: Cong, govt head for showdown

**DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI**
@ Kanakapura

THE Congress and government are headed for a confrontation with the opposition party going ahead with its big-ticket Mekedatu Yatra, starting from Sunday.

Sources said that the government is ready to tackle the yatra, which is being taken out from Mekedatu to Bengaluru, with a "judicious" use of force, ensuring that the law and order is maintained. "We will book those who violate the rules, including Covid norms and curfew regulations. The administration is prepared," said Ramanagara Deputy Commissioner Dr K Rakesh Kumar.

Echoing it, Superintendent of Police S Gireesh said the police will intervene depending on the situation. "Over 2,000 men will be deployed and, if required, more will be pushed in," he told *TNSE*.

The padayatra, being taken out to highlight the government's delay in executing the balancing reservoir project at Mekedatu along the Cauvery, may turn out to be a high-voltage drama in the Assembly segment represented by state Congress president DK Shivakumar.

CONTINUED ON: P4

## SESSION
LIKELY IN FEBRUARY

With curbs in place till January 19, the government may hold a joint Legislature session in the first week of February | P4

CELEBRATING LIFE OF PAST P2

EXPRES READ

### Mahagathbandan on the cards in Goa?

Belagavi: A grand alliance of "like-minded" political parties, including the TMC and Congress, against the ruling BJP is taking shape in Goa ahead of the Assembly elections scheduled to be held on Valentine's Day in the coastal state. P7

WITH THIS ISSUE CRADLE OF CHAOS PLUS 12 PAGES MAGAZINE

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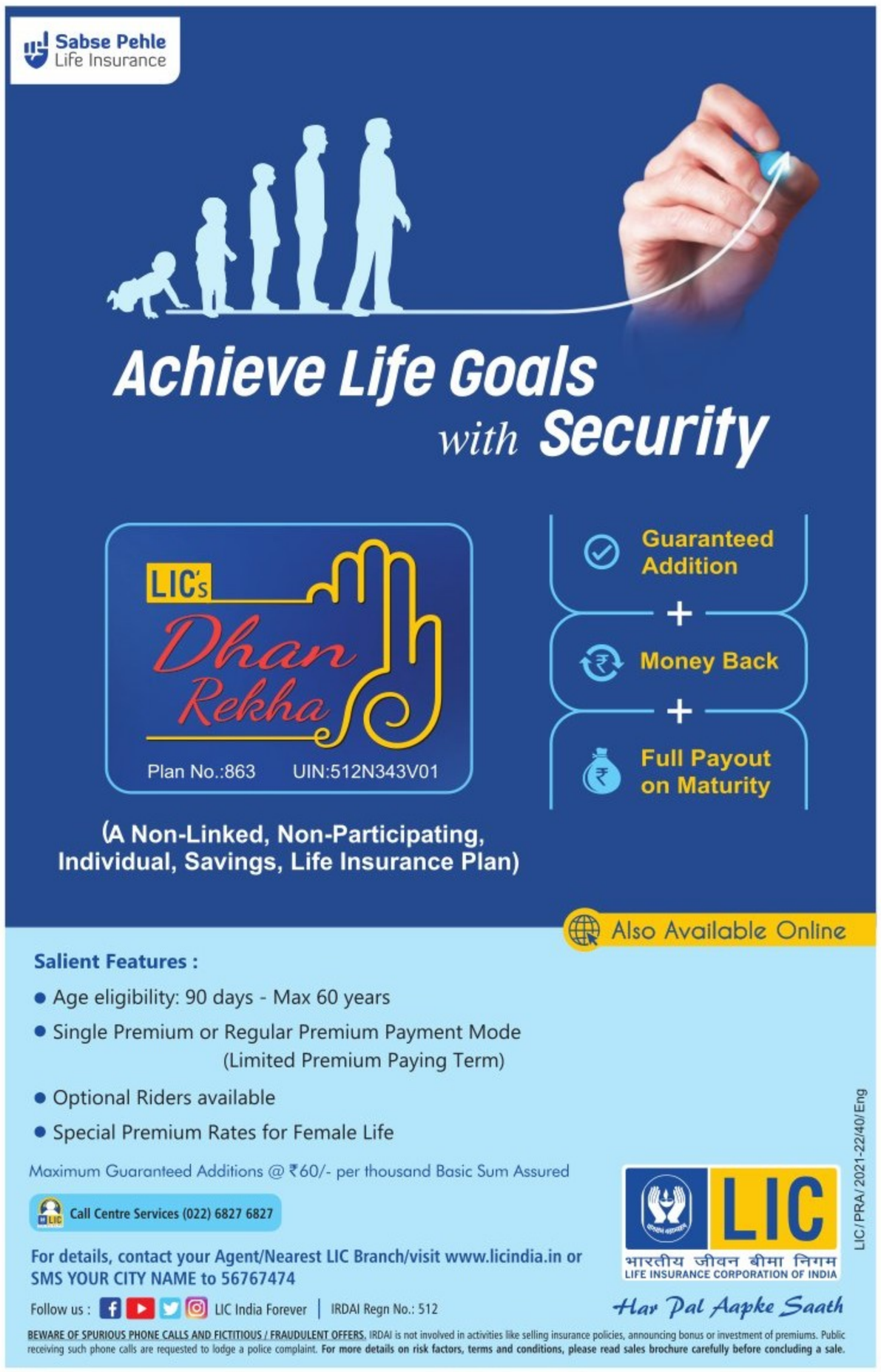
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ALMANAC TODAY
• Sunday: 09/01/2022 • Year: Plava • Ayana: Dakshinayna
• Ritu: Himantha • Masa: Pushya • Paksha: Sukla • Tithi: Sapthami 3.23 pm
• Nakshatra: Uttharabhadra 11.36 am • Moon in Mesha Rashi • Rahukaala: 04:30 pm to 06:00pm
• Gulikakala: 03:00 pm to 04:30 pm • Yamaganda: 12:00 pm to 01:30 pmm

WEATHER
MIN 17°C | MAX 28°C
FORECAST
Afternoon clouds

Sunrise 6.44 am
Sunset 6.09 pm
Moonrise 11.58 am
Moonset 12.00 pm

NSS students from Sahyadri Arts College in Shivamogga, with the exhibits at the folklore museum on campus | Shimoga Nandan

# Celebrating life of past

A folklore museum set-up by students is a treasure trove educating the current generation of the glorious past

ARPITHA I @ Shivamogga

A museum is where a piece of the past is preserved, helping the present and future generations to wonder and learn. Making an effort to showcase the forgotten lifestyle of people of Malnad, students of Sahyadri Arts College in Shivamogga have set up a folklore museum by collecting scores of artefacts and everyday items from yore.

Guided by Dr Mohan Chandragutti, assistant professor of Kannada at the college, these students, who are part of the National Service Scheme (NSS), have shaped the museum by collecting items that were used for cooking, farming and other day-to-day activities from three villages of Shivamogga district.

The museum, which is on the premises of the college, has over 200 exhibits that were collected by students in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 during their NSS camps at Rechi Koppa village (Shivamogga taluk), Kerehalli near Hanagerekatte and Adina Kottige.

During the camp, the assignment for students was to stay in the houses of local residents for a week and develop a good rapport with them. On the seventh day, they had to convince the residents to donate a unique and antique item from the house.

Dr Mohan, a former NSS officer, a folklore student and writer of many books on the subject, said, "After going to the village, my interest turned towards collecting old and traditional items to set up a museum. In the first camp, we collected 60 items from 40 houses in Adina Kottige. Most people in the village are evacuees of the Sharavathi dam project. They hailed from Sharavathi backwaters and built their houses in Adina Kottige. They had brought old items with them and thrown them randomly. We asked them to give us those items and that's how we collected many exhibits. Many students don't know about these traditional items and the museum helped them gain knowledge."

Mohan said the principal assigned a special room to set up the museum.

"I painted the walls on my own and I am now planning to embellish them with art. The museum represents the way our ancestors lived," he said.

When students went to collect the items, the residents narrated stories and history behind the artefacts. On the last day, the students were told to place the items in an orderly manner, and each student was told to name the items they collected and to tell others about their use and historical importance It motivated them to collect more and care for the objects they collected. Many students visit the museum even now and clean the objects they collected, he said.

> **After going to the village, my interest turned towards collecting old and traditional items to set up a museum. In the first camp, we collected 60 items from 40 houses in Adina Kottige. Most people in the village are evacuees of the Sharavathi dam project. They hailed from Sharavathi backwaters and built their houses in Adina Kottige. They had brought old items with them and thrown them randomly. We asked them to give us those items and that's how we collected many exhibits. Many students don't know about these traditional items and the museum helped them gain knowledge**
>
> Dr Mohan Chandragutti

Among the antiques on display is a wooden door and its frame which is 300 years old and made of teakwood. Many objects have a history of over 100 years, some 50 years and more. The age of some objects are not known as people say their ancestors used them and they saw them during their childhood, he said.

The museum consists of glass jars to preserve pickles, huge vessels made of mud, different types of wooden spoons, different types of knives and machetes, alagulimane (an ancient game), pistles, radios and tape recorders, equipment used for fishing, bamboo containers, a huge wooden boat to preserve groceries which is nearly 100 years old, lamps, wall clocks and agricultural equipment.

The artefacts at the museum have been arranged by the students. "Though I am not an NSS officer now, around 30 students came to me, cleaned the items. They sought the help of a carpenter to polish the wooden items and construct the wooden racks to place the collected items. On the last day of the camp, villagers arrived to see the exhibits and were happy to donate more," Mohan said.

### Collecting objects

Devika JR, a final-year BA student, said the task of collecting objects from the houses of villagers was a different and interesting experience.

"We learnt how important these antiquated objects are. Today, at our households we mostly use electric items and machines. Earlier, they used simple instruments that involved physical effort. These traditional, historical equipment are invaluable," Devika added.

Another student Nagaraj Kolimane said the present generation is not aware about agricultural equipment like a simple plough. Preserving them in a museum will let them know how their ancestors used them for agricultural purposes.

For Manikanta G, a student, it was a great experience to tell the present generation stories of their ancestors' lifestyle and culture.

SUBHASH CHANDRA NS @ Karwar

# SNAKE SAVIOUR

Forest guard Gopal Naik helps both animals and people in Karwar, by rescuing reptiles, birds and mammals from human habitation

> **There is risk, but the same should not be displayed like trophies. I do not display heroics, but just return the animals back home or provide them medical care when needed**
>
> Gopal Naik

SOMETIME in 2018, the Range Forest Officer in Karwar received a phone call from a resident, that a massive snake was sighted inside a well at his house near Guttinbeera Temple. He requested the RFO to dispatch somebody to rescue it and Gopal Naik was put on the job.

On reaching the house, Naik rushed to the well and peeped inside. What he saw was a magnificent python, one of the largest constrictors, and a protected species in India. As he gathered ways to rescue the reptile safely from the deep well, he realised that he ought to be careful as there were many curious onlookers around. He told the villagers to drain the water from the well, then lowered himself and saved the snake. This is one of several inspiring stories, highlighting the service of this humble forest guard, who has rescued birds, reptiles and mammals over the years.

Hailing from Anavatti in Soraba taluk of Shivamogga district, Naik's tryst with animal rescue began during his first posting at Anshi in the Kali Tiger Reserve. He was asked to assist in catching a snake, which happened to be a cobra. "A pharmacist in KPCL took me with him to catch the snake and release it into the wild. It was at his insistence that I touched a cobra for the first time. But like a lay person, I believed that snakes have their revenge against anyone who touches them, and I started believing that my end was near. But I soon overcame these thoughts, and ended up catching about 50 snakes during my stint at Anshi," Naik says.

There was no looking back for Naik. He was transferred to Karwar three years ago. Since then, over 3,000 snakes have gotten a new lease of life thanks to his efforts. These include more than 500 pythons, a couple of king cobras, over 300 birds, reptiles and a few mammals. "You find a lot of pythons around Karwar. Russell's viper is the second-most prevalent snake, followed by cobra," informs Naik.

Locals call him almost every day, whenever they spot a reptile. "One day, I rescued a sand boa from the house of a district judge. The next day, I received a call to rescue a strange-looking animal, whose head was stuck in a box of chocolates. Probably, it was looking for food. There were chances that it could bite me, which would be severe, but I managed to catch hold of its neck and later released it in a tree nearby. It was a civet," he elaborates.

**3,000**
snakes have gotten a new lease of life thanks to his efforts. These include more than
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Pythons

Once, Naik even rescued a Malabar pied hornbill, whose wings were damaged. "I learnt how to treat injured animals myself. I stitched the hornbill's wings, took care of the bird and released it when it was healthy enough to fly," he says, adding that he has also rescued common hawk-cuckoos, plum-headed parakeets, Brahminy kites, whistling ducks, monitor lizards, monkeys, and wild boars.

### Keen naturalist

A graduate, Naik has made use of his knowledge to train the younger generation and educate them about birds and animals. A keen naturalist, Naik is involved in the scientific study of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. "I teach whatever I have learnt to children, particularly in rural areas," he says.

Naik visits about a hundred schools in the district to create awareness among students. "He teaches them not to be scared of reptiles, and particularly those in distress, or provoke them, or handle them without safety gear," says Karwar-based journalist Nagendra Kharvi.

But Naik's task is not devoid of risk. A year ago, he was bitten by a cobra, which he was trying to rescue from a heap of coconuts in Kodibhag. He went to hospital and got himself treated. Luckily, it was a dry bite (very minimal amount of venom injected). He uses gloves and other protective gear when he is out on a mission these days.

"There is risk. I do not display heroics, but just return the animals back home or provide them medical care when needed," affirms Naik, as he attends to relieve more animals from pain and distress.

### A rescue that almost went wrong

At Bandisutta, a 70-kg python was to be rescued. Naik had held the serpent by its head, with others holding it by its stomach and tail. "The task was to put it into a large bin. People were hesitant to come and help lift the python. I asked them to hold it tight by its stomach. But despite instruction, they dumped its tail in the bin first. The reptile immediately used its tail and managed to jump out, before escaping. I had the task of looking out for it again. I finally caught it and told the others to hold it properly before we could recover the animal," Gopal Naik says.

Vernal hanging parrot (top) and Grey Fronted Green Pigeon | GOPAL NAIK

## STREETS EMPTY OUT DURING WEEKEND CURFEW

City roads wore a deserted look on Day 1 of the weekend lockdown

Few were seen venturing out for work or medical purposes

The police seized **798** vehicles including **729** bikes, **25** autorickshaws and **44** four-wheelers for violating curfew norms

**BMTC buses plied at reduced frequency**

Passengers travelling to the airport were allowed after checking flight bookings

At one check point, BBMP officials found an autorickshaw with eight passengers, all without masks. The police took the driver into custody and seized the vehicle

Police personnel monitor vehicular movement at a check point in the city | ASHISHKRISHNA HP

# Hit by shutdowns, popular restaurant winds up

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

THE night and weekend curfew in the city — one of the restrictions fuelled by the pandemic — is hitting the food and beverage industry hard, which was just about getting back on its feet. Night curfew, which was imposed in April last year during the second wave, was lifted on November 8 after seven months.

One of the fine dining places, also known for good music in the city, Tao Terraces, downed shutters on Saturday evening after owner Naren Beliappa said that repeated closures, high rentals, unrelenting landlords and government apathy had left him with no option but to close for now.

Beliappa posted on social media announcing the closure stating that after 10 years, "your favourite music destination, the Tao Terraces, is closing today. Our biggest challenge has been high rentals and the fact that we are the first ones to be closed every time restrictions are announced and last to be re-opened. When we closed our doors temporarily in March last year, none of us imagined then that Covid would still be prevalent 21 months later. But we kept our hopes high even in the face of an impossible situation because we love what we do so much..presenting the best music to the best crowd in the world!" Beliappa stated.

He said that repeated closures have driven the F&B industry in the city to the brink. "It has become unviable and unsustainable. How do we pay Excise duty, run our business and pay our staff in the face of repeated closures?" he asked.

The head of Bengaluru chapter of the National Restaurants Association of India (NRAI) and co-founder of popular microbrewery Toit, Mukesh Tolani, said that they had approached the Excise Department with a request to relax the night curfew till 11.30 pm instead of 10 pm on weekdays.

"We have lost a major chunk of business due to the pandemic. Our weekday business is minimal because of the lack of

IT crowd. Night curfew from 10pm, and now the weekend curfew has dealt a body blow to restaurants, pubs and bars. Forget business, our survival and that of our staff is at stake," he said, adding that their efforts to meet the Chief Minister and Excise Commissioner to allow them to do business on weekends have gone in vain because of their preoccupation with the new Covid-19 wave," he added.

The cascading effect of the weekend curfew on staff and suppliers of bar and restaurants is another major worry. "Our weekend supply bills including meat, vegetables, etc., during normal times is around Rs 4 lakh. It has come to zero because we are forced to close down on weekends. This also impacts the stakeholders like suppliers and staff. Weekend lockdown is brutal to F&B sector. A night curfew is good enough in times like this," felt Rajesh Rajaram of Ebony restaurant.

NRAI national committee member Amit Roy of Watson's said that F&B industry in Karnataka has been bearing the brunt of repeated closures since March 2020. "We are made to pay Excise licence fee in advance, which we have been doing diligently despite the fact that there were months when we were completely shut down during the national lockdown in early 2020. We have not asked the government for any concession. We are requesting them to waive the licence fee for the months when we were closed. There is no support from the government and the pressure from landlords to pay rents on time is a killer. We are made to close shop on the smallest of pretexts — elections, festivals or law and order. The pandemic-related restrictions have taken our breath away," said Roy.

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In the last 48 hours, 30 Covid-19 cases were reported at the Kudgi plant of the National Thermal Power Corporation Limited (NTPC) in Vijayapura. Meanwhile, several police officers in Mandya have tested positive, including the SP and DySP

## TRACKING COVID-19

**DURATION OF PANDEMIC**
**1 YEAR, 306 DAYS**

**CASES REPORTED**
Today: **8,906** | Yesterday: **8,449**

**TALLY**
Today: **30,39,958**
Yesterday: **30,31,052**

| DEATHS | DISCHARGES |
|---|---|
| Today: **4** | Today: **508** |
| Yesterday: **4** | Yesterday: **505** |

**ACTIVE CASES**
Today: **38,507**
Yesterday: **30,113**

| POSITIVITY RATE | MORTALITY RATE |
|---|---|
| Today: **5.28%** | Today: **1.26%** |
| Yesterday: **5.28%** | Yesterday: **1.26%** |

**RECOVERY RATE**
Today: **97.47%**
Yesterday: **97.73%**

**DISTRICT-WISE COVID CASES**
LAST 24 HOURS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Bengaluru Urban** | **7,113** |
| **Bengaluru Rural** | **111** |
| Bagalkot | 6 |
| Ballari | 43 |
| Belagavi | 70 |
| Bidar | 13 |
| Chamarajanagar | 10 |
| Chikkaballapur | 36 |
| Chikkamagaluru | 22 |
| Chitradurga | 15 |
| Dakshina Kannada | 295 |
| Davanagere | 12 |
| Dharwad | 56 |
| Gadag | 16 |
| Hassan | 139 |
| Haveri | 0 |
| Kalaburagi | 58 |
| Kodagu | 26 |
| Kolar | 65 |
| Koppal | 3 |
| Mandya | 183 |
| Mysuru | 203 |
| Raichur | 4 |
| Ramanagara | 28 |
| Shivamogga | 66 |
| Tumakuru | 53 |
| Udupi | 186 |
| Uttara Kannada | 52 |
| Vijayapura | 22 |
| Yadgir | 0 |

**SLOW DAY**

A health worker waits to collect swab samples as marshals keep an eye to ensure Covid norms are followed, at KR Market on Saturday. Even during the weekend curfew, when the city virtually came to a standstill, frontline workers stayed put on their job | SHRIRAM B N

# Malleswaram to have doorstep swab collection

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

IN the wake of the surge in Covid-19 cases in Bengaluru, Minister Dr C N Ashwath Narayan on Saturday convened a meeting with officials and inspected preparedness at KC General Hospital in Malleswaram.

He announced that doorstep swab collection will be introduced in the constituency. "Testing will also be done by visiting door-to-door. I have also asked officials to identify a public health centre in the constituency that will operate 24/7," Narayan said.

After the visit, he directed officials to immediately submit a proposal seeking to fill the shortage of medical and paramedical staff in the hospital, and assured them of immediate approval.

He said officials have been asked to take steps to operationalise the helpline and war room that functioned during the second wave and also to set up the Covid care centre.

Meanwhile, the minister asked BBMP officials to consult with companies like Wipro to avail effective Cloud Medical Services (Cloud Surgeon Service) and to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Life Science Diagnostic Centre to facilitate certain medical tests and make arrangements with ISCKON to provide nutritious food for those who admitted to hospitals for treatment.

During the visit, he reviewed the progress of the construction of buildings of a 50-bed paediatric division and a 60-bed division of Jayadeva Cardiac Centre. Currently, the KC General hospital is equipped with 106 beds with ventilators, 11 HFNC oxygen beds, 60-bed step-down ICU with HE monitor, 3,000 pulse oximeter banks, 200 contactless monitors, 100 oxygen concentrators, and 200 home isolation oxygen concentrators. In addition to this, the PHC at Palace Guttahalli has a 30-bed step-down ICU ward, a ward with 15 C-Tap machines to treat children, and a high-tech laboratory.

# PANEL REVISES GUIDELINES FOR MANAGEMENT OF ADULT COVID-19

In the light of the increase in number of fresh Covid-19 cases, a newly-formed team of experts from Karnataka's Clinical Expert Committee has revised its clinical guidance for management of the infection in mild, moderate and severe cases

AT CCC ONLY
For high risk patients:
Injecton Remdesivir 200 mg IV on Day 1, 100 mg IV on Day 2 and 3.
Cap. Molnupiravir 800mg for five days.

**ASYMPTOMATIC/MILD CASES**

**SYMPTOMS**
Upper respiratory tract symptoms (with or without fever) without shortness of breath or hypoxia: To be home-isolated or in CCC

**MUST DOS**
- Physical distancing, indoor mask use, strict hand hygiene.
- Symptomatic management
- Continue medications for other comorbid illnesses.

**TREATMENT**
- Tab paracetamol 650mg
- Inhalational Budesonide for cough
- Tab Vitamin C 500mg 1-1-1 for 5-7 days
- Tab Zinc 50mg OD for 5-7 days

**MONITOR**
- Temperature
- Oxygen saturation

**RED FLAG SIGNS**
- Worsening of symptoms
- Shortness of breath/ breathlessness
- SpO2<94% on any occasion
- Neutrophyl/lymphocyte ratio >3.5
- Resting Heart Rate >100bpm

**ENDING ISOLATION**
- After seven days from onset of symptoms and no fever for three days.
- No need for RTPCR after home isolation period is over.

**MODERATE CASES**

**SYMPTOMS**
- Respiratory rate - Below 24/min breathlessness.
- SPO2 - 90% to below 93%

**TREATMENT**
- Oxygen support
- Awake proning to be done
- Anti-inflammatory or immunomodulatory therapy
- Injection Methylpedniosolone or Dexamethasone
- Patients may be initiated or switched to oral route if stable or improving
- Anticoagulation drug: Prophylactic unfractionated heparin.

**MONITORING**
Clinical monitoring: Work of breathing, haemodynamic instablity, change in oxygen requirement.
- HRCT chest to be done only if there is worsening.
- Tests CRP and D-Dimer 48-72 hours, CBC, KFT,LFT 25-48 hourly
- IL-6 levels to be done if deteriorating.

**Discharge:** After clinical improvement, discharge as per criteria.

**SEVERE CASES**

**SYMPTOMS**
- Respiratory rate - Below 30/ min, breathlessness
- SPO2 - Below 90%
- Admit in ICU

**TREATMENT**
- Respiratory support
- Use of NIV in patients if breathing is low.
- Use of HFNC in patients with increasing oxygen requirement.
- Intubation should be prioritised in patients with high work of breathing
- Ventilatory management, if necessary, as per protocol.
- Injection Methylprednisolone or Injection Dexamethasone
- Anticoagulation: Prophylactic unfractionated heparin or low molecular weight heparin.

**SUPPORTIVE MEASURES**
- Maintain euvolemia
- If there is spesis/septic shock, manage as per existing protocol

**MONITORING**
- Serial CKR, HRCT chest to be done only if there is worsening
- Lab monitoring, CRP and D-Dimer CBC, KFT, LFT, IL-6.

**USE OF MEDICATION**

**Remdesivir:** Only in patients with no renal or hepatic dysfunction and initiated earliest after onset of symptoms.

**Tocilizumab:** Presence of severe disease (preferably within 24 to 48 hours of onset of severe disease/ICU admission), significantly raised inflammatory markers; Not improving despite use of steroids; No active bacterial/fungal/tubercular infection.

(Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Medical Education, Government of Karnataka)

# Positivity rate rising in Bengaluru

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

BELLANDUR has more than 300 active cases and is in Level 6, while Varthur, Hagadur, Dodda Nekkundi, Koramangala, HSR Layout, Rajarajeshwari Nagar, Horamavu, Shantala Nagar and Begur are in Level 5.

The number of microcontainment zones, at 346, too has increased over the last ten days. Mahadevpura zone tops the list with 116 such zones, followed by Bommanahalli (90), South (37), West (33), East (29), Darsarahalli (5) and RR Nagar (3).

"The positivity rate has been going up in Bengaluru drastically. Just two days ago, it was around 7 per cent, but it has gone up to 10.53 per cent now. Even Bengaluru Rural has recorded a positivity of 5.95 per cent. Global trends show that it is just a matter of few weeks before other districts too will start showing high positivity rates. Already, districts like Mandya, Mysuru, Shivamogga and Udupi, are recording an uptick. Weekend and night curfews will prevent this rate from going up," said Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar.

Officials said the number of tests in the city has been increased to nearly 70,000 per day, which has resulted in more positive cases being reported.

"Some areas are reporting more cases because of clusters in apartments in those areas. We have informed apartment associations to stop all gatherings and congregations. We have also asked them to check people's travel history," said a BBMP official.

Meanwhile, Dr Sudhakar tweeted that Karnataka has ramped up Covid testing to the highest levels since the beginning of the latest surge. "Yesterday, we conducted 2 lakh tests. Karnataka has conducted 5.73 crore tests to date, the third highest in the country," he said.

**SOUTH INDIAN Bank**
CIN: L65191KL1929PLC001017
Regional Office: SIB Arcade, #61, Wheeler Road, Cox Town, Bangalore – 560 005. Tel./ Fax No: +91 80-25479091 / 92
E-mail: ro1010@sib.co.in.
Website: www.southindianbank.com

**APPENDIX- IV-A** [See proviso to rule 8 (6)]
**Sale notice for sale of immovable properties**

**Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002**

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the South Indian Bank Ltd, Branch Tumkur (Secured Creditor), the Physical Possession of which was taken on 29.08.2020 by the Authorised Officer of The South Indian Bank Limited, Regional Office Bangalore (Secured Creditor), will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and " Whatever there is" on 02.02.2022, for recovery of an amount of **Rs.26,65,85,850.73** (Rupees Twenty Six Crore Sixty Five Lakh Eighty Five Thousand Eight Hundred and Fifty and seventy three paise only) as on 05.01.2022 due to The South Indian Bank Limited, Branch Tumkur, (Secured Creditor) from **M/s Swarnmandir Jewel Designer Private Limited**, (CIN:U33208KA2009PTC050106) IInd floor, Santhrupthi Complex, Vivekananda Road, Tumkur 572101 and Guarantors, **1) Mr. Kishoor Kumar Pukharaj alias Kishoor Kumar P alias Kishore Kumar P alias Kishor Kumar P,** (Director, M/s Swarnmandir Jewel Designer Private Limited) **2) Mrs.Sobha K, Director, M/s Swarnmandir Jewel Designer Private Limited 3) Mr. Aditya Kishoor,** No.1 to No.3 residing at: #73, Rajagopal Nagar Main Road, Karnataka Urban Co-operative Society Layout, Peenya, Bangalore -560058., **4) Mr. Mohan Raj Parameshwara, S/o. Parameshwara K** (Director, M/s Swarnmandir Jewel Designer Private Limited) 5) Mr. Kumaresh K, **6) Mr. Jagadeesh K, 7) Mr. Parameshwara K,** No.4 to No.7 residing at No.8, O.T.C. Road, Next to Sharada Theatre, Bangalore-560002

The reserve price will be **Rs.95,00,000.00** (Rupees Ninety Five Lakh only), and the earnest money deposit will be **Rs.9,50,000.00** (Rupees Nine Lakh Fifty Thousand only)

**SECURED ASSET**

All that piece and parcel of residential flat – No.C2-1041 in the Fourth Floor with built up area of 1499.99 Square Feet and 298.96 Square feet, proportionate share in common areas, exclusive right over one covered Car parking in the basement in the Apartment building "Sobha Ruby Platinum" along with 0.10% equivalent to 564.38 Square feet of undivided share in residentially converted lands measuring about 566715.892 Square feet (after excluding portion marked for Kharab land, park, open spaces, Civic amenities BDA road widening and future development) in Sy No 5/3, 18/1, 18/2, 18/3,18/4, 18/5, 18/6, 23,68, 69/2 and 70 portion of Nagasandra Village , Yeshvanthapura Hobli, Bangalore North Taluk (presently Chokkasandra under limits of Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BBMP Khatha No.1), Bangalore. Boundaries: East by: Village Road & Private Property, West By : Private Property North By: Road (Bangalore –Pune Highway) South by : Private Property Flat boundaries: East: Open to sky, West: Common passage & thereafter lift, Flat C2-1043, C2-1042, North Staircase area, South: Open to sky The property is owned by Mr. Kishoor Kumar P under Sale deed 5579/2011-12 dt 30.09.2011 (CD PNYD484 dt 30.09.2011) SRO Peenya

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in South Indian Bank Ltd, (Secured Creditor) website i.e. **www. southindianbank.com**

**Date : 06.01.2022** | **Sd/- Authorised Officer**
**Place : Bengaluru** | **The South Indian Bank Ltd.**

**Chola** Enter a better life
**CHOLAMANDALAM INVESTMENT AND FINANCE COMPANY LIMITED**
Corporate Office: 1st Floor, 'Dare House', No.2, N.S.C. Bose Road, Chennai-600001.
Branch Address: Municipal No.45, (Old Nos. 45& 45/1), Second Floor, Lalbagh Road, Bangalore-560027.

**DEMAND NOTICE UNDER SECTION 13[2] OF THE SECURITISATION & RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT 2002**

You, the under mentioned Borrower / Mortgagor is hereby informed that the company has initiated proceedings against you under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and that the Notice under 13 (2) of the Act sent to you by Registered Post Ack. Due for Borrower/s has been returned undelivered. Hence, you are hereby called upon to take notice and pay the outstanding loan amount mentioned against the said account with interest accruing there from within 60 days from the date of this publication, failing which the company will proceed against you by exercising its right under Sub-Sec (4) of Section 13 of the Act by enforcing the below mentioned security to realize its dues with interests and costs. It is needles to mention that this notice is addressed to you without prejudice to any other remedy available to the company.

| Sl. No. | Loan Account No. & Name and Address of the Borrower/s | Loan Amount | Date of Demand Notice & Amount Outstanding |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Loan Account No. X0HEBAN00001268608.** **1) Sangeetha J P,** No.1, Rathan Mahal, Rathan Singh Layout Kaval Byrasandra, R T Nagar, Bangalore-560032. **2) Charan Singh,** No.1, Rathan Mahal, Rathan Singh Layout Kaval Byrasandra, R T Nagar, Bangalore-560032. **3) Rathan Singh,** No.1 Rathan Mahal, Rathan Singh Layout Kaval Byrasandra, R T Nagar, Bangalore-560032. **4) Amar Singh,** No.1, Rathan Mahal, Rathan Singh Layout Kaval Byrasandra, R T Nagar, Bangalore-560032. | **Rs. 1,25,00,000/-** | **22.12.2021 & Rs. 78,09,392.74** as on 20-12-2021 together with interest thereon. |
| | **Description of the property/ Secured Asset:** All that piece and parcel of House property bearing Kaneshumari (Khatha) No.143/207, Site No.51, formed out of Old Sy.No.33/2 of Kaval Byrasandra Panchayath, Kasaba Hobli, Banglore North Taluk, Presently within the limits of BBMP and **bounded on East by** Common Passage and approach road in the same property **West by** Private Property **North by** Private Property (Magala Rathana Apartment) **South by** Remaining portion of the Donors property measring East to West North side 96 and East to West on Southern side 96 feet and North to South on Eastern side 72 feet and North to South on Western side 80 feet Out of East to West 97 feet and North to South 96 feet. | | |

**Date: 09-01-2022** | **Sd/- Authorised Officer**
**Place: Bangalore** | **Cholamandalam Investment And Finance Company Limited.**

**UJVN LIMITED**
H.O.: "UJJWAL", Maharani Bagh, GMS Road, Dehradun-248006
Phone: 0135- 2763808, Fax: 0135- 2763508
CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website: www.ujvnl.com

पत्र सं. 27, **e-Tender Notice** दिनांक: 07.01.2022
Office of the (Executive Engineer (E&M), Joshiyara Barrage, invites online bids from interested parties. Brief summary of tender is given below :
**Tender No.NCB/16/EE(E&M)/MB-II/Barrage/2021-22**
**Name of work.:** Design, Manufacturing, Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Trash rack panels & one no. Hydraulically Operated Movable Trash Rack Cleaning Machine (TRCM) to safely handle rake capacity of 2.0 Tonne as well as log grappler capacity of 2.0 Tonne including dismantling of existing Trash rack panels &TRCM at Joshiyara Barrage, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand, India.
**Estimated cost:** Rs. 741.31 Lakh (inclusive of GST)
**Date of availability of bid document on website:** 15.01.2022 16:00 hrs
**Last date for submission of bids on website:** 03.03.2022 16:00 hrs
For fuller & further details, kindly visit e-procurement portal http://uktenders.gov.in"

"AVOID WASTEFUL USE OF ELECTRICITY" (Executive Engineer)

**यूनियन बैंक Union Bank of India**
Ullal Main Road Branch
Address: 199 &198, Ullal Main Road, 6th Main, Annapoorneshwari Layout, Jnanabharathi Nagar, Bangalore- 560056 Phone No:080-23241965
Mail Id: bm2337@unionbankofindia.com

**Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Property**

**E-Auction Sale Notice for 30 days Sale of immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to rule 8(6) of the Security Interest ( Enforcement) Rule, 2002**

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of **Union Bank of India** ( secured Creditor) will be sold on **" As is where is", " As is what is " and " whatever there is"** on the date mentioned below, for recovery of dues as mentioned hereunder to Union bank of India from the below mentioned Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s). The Reserve Price and the Earnest Money Deposit are also mentioned hereunder:

**Name and address of the Secured Creditor : Union Bank of India, Ullal Main Road Branch,** 199 &198, Ullal Main Road, 6th Main, Annapoorneshwari Layout, Jnanabharathi Nagar, Bangalore- 560056
**1. Name and address of the Borrower, Co-Applicant and Guarantor: 1) Mrs. Komala** W/o Narayana Swamy, Door No.HN 366, Near Bus Stop, 5th Cross, Ullalupanagar, Bangalore, Karnataka- 560110. **2) Mr.Narayana Swamy,** Door No.HN 366, Near Bus Stop, 5th Cross, Ullalupanagar, Bangalore, Karnataka- 560110.

**Amount due: Rs.20,41,350/-** as on **22-04-2021** and the interest and charges thereupon.
**Description of immovable secured assets to be sold:** All that part of the property bearing No. 199, measuring East to West: 24 feet and North to South: 33 feet totally measuring 792 Sq.ft situated at Ullal Village, Yeshwanthpura-2 Hobli, Bangalore North Thaluk ,Bangalore 560056 Bounded: On the North by: Gutter/pit, On the South by: Road, On the East by: Road, On the West by: Property belongs to Diyavappa.

**Date and time of E-Auction: 17.02.2022 between 11 am to 2 pm (with 10 min unlimited auto extensions)**
**E-auction website-www.mstcecommerce.com**
**Last date for submission of EMD : On 16.02.2022**
**Reserve Price: Rs.42,12,000, EMD Amount: Rs.4,21,200**

**2. Name and address of the Borrower, Co-Applicant and Guarantor: 1) Mrs.Latha S,** No.5 Near Ganesha Temple, Ullalu Upanagara, Bangalore- 560056 **(2) Mr. Narasimha Murthy NT,** No.5 Near Ganesha Temple, Ullalu Upanagara, Bangalore- 560056 **(3) Mrs. Latha** S/o Mr.Narasimha Murthy NT, No.24, Manjunathanagar, Seegehalli Village, Magadi Road, Bangalore - 560091.

**Amount due: Rs.16,70,224** as on **10-04-2021** and the interest and charges thereupon.
**Description of immovable secured assets to be Sold:** All that part of the property bearing No BBMP Katha No.370/199 measuring east west: 30 feet and north to south: 40 feet totally measuring 1200 sq.ft situated at survey no 199, Ullalu Village , Yeshwanthpura-2 Hobli, Bangalore North Thaluk,Bangalore 560056 Bounded: On the North by: Property belongs to Smt. Nanjamma, On the South by: Road.On the East by: Property belongs to Sri. Krishnappa,On the West by: Road:

**Date and time of E-Auction: 17.02.2022 between 11 am to 2 pm (with 10 min unlimited auto extensions)**
**E-auction website-www.mstcecommerce.com**
**Last date for submission of EMD : On 16.02.2022**
**Reserve Price: Rs.47,00,000, EMD Amount: Rs.4,70,000**

For Detailed terms and condition of the sale, please refer to the link provided in **(1) https://www.ibapi.in (2) www.unionbankofindia.co.in**
The intending purchaser require to register through: **https://www.mstcecommerce.com/auctionhome/ibapi/index.jsp**
The online E-auction will be held through website: **sarfaesi@unionbankofindia.com.**
**For auction related queries e-mail to sarfaesi@unionbankofindia.com or contact For auction related queries e-mail to sarfaesi@unionbankofindia.com or contact Union Bank of India, Ullal Main Road Branch, Bangalore. Ph. 080-23241965 Branch Manager Mr. Mahesh Kumar P on Mob: 8074705968.**

**Date: 07.01.2022** | **Sd/- Authorised Officer**
**Place: Bangalore** | **Union Bank of India.**

**HELPLINE**
THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS
For Subscriptions & Supply related Complaints
Call / WhatsApp
**9886143555**
7 AM - 4 PM MONDAY to SATURDAY

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Notice is hereby given that **CHELLARAM MILLS INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED,** having its registered office at No. 18 and 23, 1st Phase, Peenya Industrial Area, Bangalore - 560058, represented herein by its directors **Mr. Mukesh Gelaram Talreja** and **Mrs. Neelam Mukesh Talreja ("Owner"),** is negotiating with our client **("our Client")** to sell the property more particularly described in the schedule below **("Said Property").**

All persons, entity, firm, institution (corporate or otherwise) claiming any right, title and/or interest, demand and/or any encumbrance of any nature whatsoever, either directly or indirectly, in respect of the Said Property or any part thereof or upon the Owner or its predecessors in title, including but not limited to by way of sale, restructuring, lease, sub- lease, transfer deed, inheritance, agreements, memorandum of understanding, pending litigation, exchange, mortgage, hypothecation, charge, lien, trust, security, possession, easement, attachment, acquisition or otherwise howsoever, are hereby required to make the same known to the undersigned in writing, along with the relevant documents evidencing their right, title and interest respect of the Said Property, within 15 (fifteen) days from the date of this notice, failing which the sale of the Said Property will be completed, without any reference to such claim and the same, if any, shall not be entertained nor be binding on our Client and shall be considered as non-existent and /or waived.

**SCHEDULE**
**DESCRIPTION OF THE SAID PROPERTY**

All that piece and parcel of the KIADB property bearing Nos. 18 and 23 (new municipal No. 3) measuring 7 acres and 2361 sq ft (3,07,281 sq ft) along with the buildings constructed thereon, situated at Peenya I Phase Industrial Area, carved out of Sy Nos. 24, 35, 36 and 37 of Peenya Village, Yeshwanthpur hobli, Bangalore North taluk, presently BBMP ward No. 01(HMT) and bounded as follows:

On or towards the North by : Plot No. 17 and 24 ;
On or towards the South by : Plot No. 19 and 22 ;
On or towards the East by : 40 ft road;
On or towards the West by : 60 ft road.

Place: Bangalore, Date: 08.01.2022

**Preetam D'Souza**
**Partner, Kochhar & Co.,**
Advocates and Legal Consultants,
No.201, Prestige Sigma, No.3
Vittal Mallya Road, Bangalore – 560001.

**SOUTHERN RAILWAY**
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DIVISION - ELECTRICAL / WORKS

**E-Tender Notice No. V-EG-OT-11-2021-2022 Dt. 05-01-2022**

**Name of work:** Trivandrum Division Provision of Ring Main Unit (RMU) at various stations having HT supply points between CAPE-TCR.
**Value:** Rs. 1,75,50,144/-
**EMD:** Rs. 2,37,800/-
**Tender closing date & time:** 31-01-2022 at 14.00 hrs
Complete details & tender document will be available at **www.ireps.gov.in.**

**Divisional Railway Manager / Electrical / Trivandrum Division**

Follow us on: twitter.com/GMSRailway

**GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU**
Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department
District Rural Development Agency, Erode

**Short Retender Notice Roc.No. 3800/2021/A11 Dt. 07.01.2022**
**Notice Inviting Tenders for Supply of Steel rods for the year 2021-22**

1. For full details, visit **www.tntenders.gov.in**
2. e-Bid are invited by the Additional Collector (Dev) / Project Director, District Rural Development Agency, Erode District under two cover system for supply of Steel rods for the year 2021-22.
3. The bid documents can also be downloaded free of cost from **www.tntenders.gov.in** from **11.01.2022** to **28.01.2022.**
4. Common date and time for downloading of Bid document, submission and opening:

| | |
|---|---|
| (i) Last Date and Time for downloading and Online Submission of Bid Documents | 28.01.2022 Upto 3.00 PM |
| (ii) Date and Time for Online opening of Bid Documents | 28.01.2022 4.00 PM onwards |

DIPR/158/Tender/2022
Additional Collector (Dev) / Project Director, District Rural Development Agency, Erode District, Erode

**All the news. In just a click.**
Log to www.newindianexpress.com

**CITY UNION BANK LIMITED**
Credit Recovery and Management Department
Administrative Office : No. 24-B, Gandhi Nagar, Kumbakonam - 612 001.
E-Mail id : crmd@cityunionbank.in, Ph : 0435-2432322, Fax : 0435-2431746

**POSSESSION NOTICE (Immovable Properties)**

Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of **City Union Bank Ltd.,** having its Administrative Office at No.24-B, Gandhi Nagar, Kumbakonam - 612 001 and one of the Branch Offices of **City Union Bank Ltd.** as mentioned below: Under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13 (2) & (12), read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice dated as mentioned below calling upon the borrowers to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of the said notice. The borrowers below named having failed to repay the amount despite the receipt of the above referred statutory notice, NOTICE is hereby given to the borrowers below named and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules. The borrowers below named in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the properties and any dealings with the properties will be subject to the charge of City Union Bank Ltd. for an amount as mentioned below and interest till the repayment of entire dues.

**City Union Bank Ltd., No.6, Ganesh Chambers, Dodda Banaswadi Main Road, Banaswadi, Bengaluru Urban - 560043.**

**I. Name of the Borrowers: No.1) M/s. Om Shakthi Tours and Travels, 3rd Main Road, Maruthi Complex, Hoysala Nagar, Opp. FMC Ramamurthy Nagar, Bangalore - 560016. No.2) Mr. C.P. Magesh Shankar, S/o. C.N. Paramasivan, 2nd Floor, Maruthi Complex, Hoysala Nagar, Ramamurthy Nagar, Bangalore - 560016. No.3) Mrs. Nethra Magesh, W/o. C.P. Magesh Shankar, 2nd Floor, Maruthi Complex, Hoysala Nagar, Ramamurthy Nagar, Bangalore - 560016.**

**Date of Demand Notice : 10-08-2021 followed by Paper Publication dated 30-09-2021. Date of Possession : 06-01-2022. Amount Outstanding : Rs.61,30,453/- (Rupees Sixty One Lakh Thirty Thousand Four Hundred and Fifty Three Only) within 60 days from the date of the said Notice with subsequent interest thereon from 25-11-2021 till the repayment of entire dues.**

**The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of Sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.**

**Note : 1)** That our **318 - Bengaluru-Banaswadi Branch** has also extended Financial Assistance (FITL - ADHOC: 501912090018905) dated **17-10-2020** requested by No.1 of you represented by No.2 of you as Proprietor for the facility for a Total Amount of **Rs.1,15,000/-** at a ROI of **14.75%.** The same has been also classified as **NPA** on **05-12-2020** and the outstanding balance as on **24-11-2021** is **Rs.1,36,602/-** plus further interest and penal interest of **2.00%** with monthly rests to be charged from **25-11-2021** till the date of realization.

**2)** That our **318 - Bengaluru-Banaswadi Branch** has also extended Financial Assistance (CREDIT CARD AGAINST LOAN: 512120020026592) dated **26-09-2018** requested by No.2 of you for the facility for a Total Amount. The same has been also classified as **NPA** on **15-12-2020** and the outstanding balance as on **24-11-2021** is **Rs.86,544/-** plus further interest and penal interest of **2.00%** with monthly rests to be charged from **25-11-2021** till the date of realization.

**Immovable Property Mortgaged to our Bank**
**Property - 1: (Property Owned by Mr. C.P Magesh Shankar, S/o. Mr. C.N. Paramasivan)**

All that piece and parcel of the Immovable Property bearing Site No.40 formed in Old Property No.84, New No.14, Khatha No.14/99 situated at Maragondanahalli Village, Bidarahalli Hobli, Bangalore East Taluk. Measuring:- East to West 40 ft. and North to South (29½ + 34)/2 totally measuring 1,270 Sq.ft. and bounded on the: East by - Site No.39, West by - Site No.41, North by - Road, South by - Private Property.

**II. Name of the Borrowers: No.1) Mrs. N. Nandhini, W/o. M. Mohan, at No.7/1, J.H.R. Building, 2nd Cross Street, Manjunath Nagar, Bangalore - 560016. Also at, Mrs. N. Nandhini, W/o. M. Mohan, No.40, 5th Cross, Magadi Road, Cholur Palya, Bangalore - 560023. No.2) Mr. M. Mohan, S/o. R.C. Manogar, No.7/1, J.H.R. Building, 2nd Cross Street, Manjunath Nagar, Bangalore - 560016.**

**Date of Demand Notice : 07-09-2021 followed by Paper Publication dated 29-10-2021. Date of Possession: 06-01-2022. Amount Outstanding: Rs.12,04,366/- (Rupees Twelve Lakh Four Thousand Three Hundred and Sixty Six Only) within 60 days from the date of the said Notice with subsequent interest thereon from 27-12-2021 till the repayment of entire dues.**

**The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.**

**Immovable Property Mortgaged to our Bank**
**Property - 1: (Property Owned by Mrs. N. Nandhini, W/o. Mr. M. Mohan)**

All that piece and parcel of the Property Flat No.G-20 Ground Floor, measuring 850 Sq.Ft. of Super builtup Area containing Two Bed Room, RCC Roofing, Vitrified Flooring together with one Open Car Parking Space including proportionate share in Common Area in the Building known as J.H.R. Apartments constructed on property bearing No.25, H.L.No.97/5, Property No.91/5 situated at Horamavu Village, K.R. Puram Hobli, Bangalore East Taluk, Bangalore, now coming under BBMP limit measuring, East to West 72.5 + 74.2/2 Feet and North to South 96 + 92/2 Feet, in all measuring 6,885.5 Sq.Feet out of which 362.39 Sq.Feet of undivided share and bounded on the East by : Site No.26, West by : Site No.24, North by : 25 Ft. Road, South by : Private Property.

**Place: Bengaluru-Banaswadi, Date: 06-01-2022**

**Authorised Officer**
**City Union Bank Ltd.**

**Regd. Office :** 149, T.S.R. (Big) Street, Kumbakonam, Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu - 612 001, **CIN -** L65110TN1904PLC001287,
**Telephone No.** 0435-2402322, **Fax :** 0435-2431746, **Website :** www.cityunionbank.com

CCB sleuth on Saturday arrested two staffers of a private lab in Bengaluru for allegedly issuing fake Covid negative certificates. Police have seized more than 50 fake Covid certificates

SUNDAY INTERVIEW

# EXPECTING THIRD WAVE TO PEAK BY MID-FEBRUARY: SUDHAKAR

RAMU PATIL @Bengaluru

*The upsurge of infection is happening in cities where Omicron is the prevalent strain. The steeper the rise, the shorter the wave is likely to be, as seen in other countries*

Dr K Sudhakar, Health Minister

AS the number of new Covid-19 cases continues to surge, **Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar** says travellers coming from high-risk countries and neighbouring states which have high case load are the main reason for it. He also said they are expecting the third wave to peak by mid-February. Excerpts from an interview:

**What are the main reasons for the sudden surge?**
We have 38,507 active cases in the state of which 32,157 are in Bengaluru Urban district. So, about 83.5 per cent of the active cases are in Bengaluru. Travellers coming from high-risk countries and neighbouring states which have high case load are the main reason for the surge in Karnataka. To check this, we have decided to further strengthen screening of inter-state travellers at entry points like railways stations and bus stations similar to airports. We will also request the Railway Ministry to make screening of travellers mandatory at boarding points.

**When is the wave likely to peak and how long is it likely to take for the situation to come under full control?**
The upsurge of infection is happening in cities where Omicron is the prevalent strain. The steeper the rise, the shorter the wave is likely to be, as seen in other countries. Like in the UK and Denmark, it is receding now. In South Africa, too, it stayed for a month. But we can't say anything clearly as it depends on our population density, vaccination coverage, etc. We are expecting the third wave to peak by mid-February.

**So, how prepared are we to handle the situation?**
After the pandemic hit us, the health infrastructure has been significantly ramped up in the state. We have augmented our capacity, especially in critical care. The number of ICU beds in Karnataka before Covid was only 725. Currently, the state has 3,877 ICU beds in government medical colleges and government hospitals — an increase of 5-6 times. There were 4,847 oxygenated beds before Covid. This has now increased to 28,447, and regular beds have increased from 41,378 to 50,629. Pre-Covid, government hospitals and medical colleges had an oxygen capacity of 320 MT, which we augmented to about 1,200 MT. During the second wave, oxygen logistics was a huge challenge — the number of cylinders before Covid was 2,180, but has increased to 13,588 cylinders now. The number of oxygen concentrators has gone up from 585 before Covid to 6,511.

**Is there an increase in hospitalisation after the surge?**
Presently, the hospitalisation rate is around 4-5 per cent. However, even if the rate of hospital admissions is lower compared to the second wave, the Omicron variant, which is highly transmissible and spreads faster than the Delta variant, may lead to a rise in admissions in absolute numbers, burdening the critical health infrastructure for a few days or weeks. But people need not unnecessarily panic as most cases, especially those fully vaccinated, don't need hospitalisation.

**When will we be able to achieve 100 per cent double-dose vaccination?**
The first dose coverage stands at 98.8% and the second dose coverage is about 80.8%. I think people had become complacent about the second dose after the second wave subsided. With a surge in cases now, more people are coming forward to get the second dose. We should be able to achieve 100% coverage in the next few weeks.

**Why is there a delay in setting up genome sequencing labs in the districts?**
Our government had proposed to set up six genome sequencing labs in Bengaluru, Mysuru, Shivamogga, Hubballi, Mangaluru, and Vijayapura. Genome sequencing can be conducted only in labs approved by Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG) as it requires expert facilities and lab equipment. We also need trained personnel including technicians, scientists and data entry operators to run the labs. We have received approval for four labs at Kalaburgi Institute of Medical Sciences, Mysore Medical College and Research Institute, Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences, and the Bowring and Lady Curzon Medical College and Research Institute, and all necessary equipment have been installed.

**Is there any strategy to ensure we test specifically for Omicron instead of the current system of sending samples for genome sequencing from cluster cases?**
We need to understand that genomic sequencing is not like the RT-PCR test and not all Covid-positive samples are suitable for it. Due to several factors, sequencing takes about 5-8 days. The sequence requires over 300 samples to initiate the process. Only Covid-positive swab samples with Cycle Threshold (CT) value below 25 qualify for genomic sequencing, as the viral load will be higher in those with low CT value. Considering these factors, it will be difficult to do targeted testing for Omicron. However, all those coming from high-risk countries are being tested for the variant.

**The Congress is holding a padayatra from January 9 despite the government prohibiting political rallies and events. Your views?**
The government is not against the padayatra. It is their democratic right to hold protests. But the Congress should rethink whether it is appropriate to hold the padayatra when Covid cases are surging and the third wave is looming. Can't they postpone and hold the protest after two months? That is all we are asking.

**Is there any possibility of imposing a lockdown if the positivity rate/cases continue to increase?**
As of now, there is no such proposal. Our ultimate aim is to keep the fatality rate low. We will do whatever it takes to achieve that.

Congress leaders, including former CM Siddaramaiah and KPCC chief D K Shivakumar, during the CLP meeting on Saturday

# Siddu says state govt cannot stop Mekedatu padayatra

## Act responsibly, ministers tell Cong leaders

DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI @ Kanakapura

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

OPPOSITION leader Siddaramaiah on Saturday accused the State Government of misguiding people about the Mekedatu project and also conspiring to scuttle the Congress' padayatra.

"As the main opposition party, it's our responsibility to create awareness about the project among people. It's an apolitical struggle in the interest of the state which we had planned two months back," he said.

On Saturday, Siddaramaiah held a three-hour long Congress Legislature Party meeting at state Congress president D K Shivakumar's residence in Kanakapura, in which all senior party leaders took an unanimous decision to go ahead with the rally come what may.

Opposition leader in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge's participation in the meeting was a morale-booster for the legislators.

Siddaramaiah said except for the environment clearance, there was no other legal hurdle for the implementation of the project.

Responding to Irrigation Minister Govind Karjol's allegation that the earlier Congress government delayed preparing the detailed project report, Siddaramaiah listed the chronology of events during his regime.

"It's our government that took the initiative in September 2013 and called for a global expression of interest in 2017 with the DPR. When the Central Water Commission raised certain objections, we addressed them, and the Congress-JD(S) alliance government revised the DPR in 2019. There is no stay from the Green Tribunal or Supreme Court. There is no legal impediment and there is no way the Tamil Nadu government can stop the project," he said.

Around 8 am on Sunday, Kharge and other senior leaders will inaugurate the padayatra at the Sangama in Mekedatu, said Shivakumar. The Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce has also extended its support, and actor Dr Shivarajkumar, son of Kannada matinee idol Dr Rajkumar, is also likely to take part. "I have extended an invitation and he is likely to attend," said Shivakumar.

WITH Congress leaders all set to start their 10-day padayatra, demanding implementation of the Mekedatu reservoir project, from Sunday, ministers in the Basavaraj Bommai cabinet appealed to the Opposition leaders to act responsibly and cooperate with the government in the fight against the pandemic.

Despite the government prohibiting political rallies and protests, the Congress is going ahead with the padayatra. Home Minister **Araga Jnanendra** said Congress leaders should not be adamant and should cooperate with the government by following the guidelines announced in the wake of the surge in Covid cases.

Terming the padayatra as politically motivated, the Home Minister said cases will be booked under the Disaster Management Act against those violating the guidelines.

"It is their right to protest, but since Covid cases are increasing, they should not take out the padayatra violating the norms and guidelines," said Water Resources Minister Govind Karjol.

Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar said the Opposition party must act responsibly. "They can go on a padayatra, marathon, horse race, trekking or whatever they like to, but this is not the time for it," he added.

In Shivamogga, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister K S Eshwarappa urged former CM Siddaramaiah and state Congress president D K Shivakumar not to go ahead with the padayatra now. "If you want to continue to fight for this issue, we don't have any issue. You continue this fight after Covid," he said and added that the government will take all measures to implement the project.

## Ready to face police action for padayatra: Cong workers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

SHIVAKUMAR'S supporters said they are ready to face police action and felt there should not be much problem, except fines imposed on them for violating rules.

Congress sources said opposition leader in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge and actor Shivaraj Kumar are expected to flag off the yatra.

To test the waters, the party may let workers assemble at the venue first. They have been told to gather at Sangama before 7.30 am. The leaders are expected to arrive at the dais later. The plan is tentative, and will change according to the situation, Congress sources said.

**As the main opposition party, it's our responsibility to create awareness about the project. It's an apolitical struggle in the interest of the state which we had planned two months back**

Siddaramaiah, Congress leader

**Congress leaders should not be adamant and should cooperate with the government. cases will be booked under the Disaster Management Act against those violating the guidelines**

Araga Jnanendra, Home Minister

**If everything goes well, the joint session, which will be addressed by Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot, may be held in the first week of February. We will hold the session by maintaining all the Covid protocols**

JC Madhuswamy, Law Minister

## Joint House session likely next month

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

WITH Covid cases increasing and statewide restrictions in place till January 19, the State Government is likely to hold the joint session of the legislature in the first week of February. After the winter session of the legislature concluded in Belagavi on December 24 last year, the government was planning to hold the pre-budget session in Bengaluru in January.

"We wanted to hold the joint session in January. But, with the Covid restrictions and rise in the number of cases, it might not be possible to hold the session this month," Law and Parliamentary Minister J C Madhuswamy told *The New Sunday Express* on Saturday.

The minister added that if everything goes well, the joint session, which will be addressed by Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot, may be held in the first week of February. "We will hold the session by maintaining all the Covid protocols," he said.

If the joint session is held in early February, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai will likely present the budget by the month-end or in the first week of March.

The Legislative Assembly had passed the Karnataka Right to Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021, during the winter session. However, the ruling party lacked the numbers in the Upper House last month, before the newly-elected MLCs took oath. "We are going to get the Bill passed in the Council in the coming session at any cost," a senior BJP leader said.

## 77 officers got promotions sans cabinet nod

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @Bengaluru

PROMOTIONS of more than 70 officials in the Industries and Commerce Department now seem to be in jeopardy. After the Karnataka Administrative Tribunal (KAT) declared their promotion in 2016 as void, a section of employees in the department are now demanding the State Government implement the tribunal order directing a redo of the promotion list.

In the last five years, 77 junior officials in the department were allegedly given promotions, not once, but twice, without getting cabinet clearance. The 77 Industrial Promotion Officers (C-cadre) were promoted as Assistant Directors (B-cadre) in 2016 and, 70 of them were promoted again as Deputy Directors (A-cadre) in May 2021. When the matter went to KAT, it termed the promotions void.

In 2016, 77 IPOs were merged with 51 Assistant Directors, raising the number of posts of Assistant Directors to 128. Sources in the department said this was done through an executive order where both the cadres were merged with certain conditions like new Assistant Directors having to work under the existing ones.

"Firstly, one cannot be promoted through just an executive order, it has to be placed before the cabinet. Secondly, they did not follow their own conditions till 2020. Only in October 2020, an executive notification was issued before preparing a seniority list for promotions," a source said.

Again, in 2021, based on the 2016 promotion posting, 70 out of 77 officers were made Deputy Directors. Along with them, seven other Assistant Directors (recruited directly in 2016), who were eligible for promotion, were also promoted as Deputy Directors. But these seven eligible officers went to KAT questioning the promotion of the 70 officers who were promoted twice even though they were not eligible, sources said.

In November 2021, the KAT passed an order stating, "We have held that the executive order of merger is untenable under law, being violative of the 1978 Act and hence, is void abinitio. The cause of action arose when the order was given effect to by amending the C&R Rules and specifically by giving retrospective effect and also preparing the revised seniority list based on the impugned notification." It also directed the government to redo the seniority list.

Official sources said despite the tribunal order, the promotion list has not been prepared. "They are getting the same salary of Deputy Director which is almost double that of an Assistant Director. They even got their salaries in December. Officials concerned have to take action," a source said.

IN DISTRESS

## *Dairy farmers face acute shortage of cattle feed*

PRAKASH SAMAGA @Udupi

Over one lakh dairy farmers from 733 milk producers' cooperative societies in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts were forced to source fodder from KMF

UNTIMELY rain and lack of raw materials with the Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) has led to a shortage of cattle feed, especially in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts. Though dairy farmers in the two districts depend on napier grass and dry hay to feed cows, the unseasonal rain in November has rotted dry hay across the region, forcing over one lakh dairy farmers from 733 milk producers' cooperative societies to source fodder from KMF.

But KMF has to supply fodder all the way from Hassan, Rajankunte and Shikaripur, where its units are situated. While the demand has increased manifold, the production at these units is hit because of scarcity of raw materials, including deoiled rice bran and maize. For dairy farmers, the waiting period to get fodder from KMF has increased which has affected milk production.

Raviraj Shetty, a dairy farmer from Asodu in Kundapur, told The New Sunday Express that there is an acute shortage of cattle feed. "I told directors of Dakshina Kannada Cooperative Milk Producers Union Ltd (DKMUL) that a separate cattle feed production unit should be set up either in Dakshina Kannada or Udupi district. While private companies sell a 50 kg bag of fodder for Rs 1,400, KMF supplies it at Rs 1,050," he said.

A DKMUL director, Sanoor Narasimha Kamath, said they have submitted a proposal to KMF to start the fodder production unit in DK district. "Forty acres of government land has been identified at Puttur and the unit may be started there," he added. DKMUL is also promoting a 'green fodder production' scheme, where farmers are encouraged to grow hybrid napier tropical grass. "They are given an incentive of Rs 20,000 (for three years) for growing napier in one acre of land. Over 3,000 acres in undivided DK district have been covered under the scheme," he said.

DKMUL president Raviraj Hegde Kodavoor said the shortage may get solved if the production unit is set up in one of the two districts.

Animal Husbandry Minister Prabhu Chauhan said he will talk to authorities concerned at KMF and ensure that there is no shortage of fodder in the state. On setting up a production unit in Udupi or Dakshina Kannada district, he said he will consult the KMF president.

The NCB, Bengaluru Zone, on Friday seized around 1 kg of methamphetamine at the Hubballi Railway Station from a Ugandan woman. The street value of the drug is said to be around Rs 1.5 crore

# K'TAKA HOPES TO ROAR AGAIN AFTER TIGER CENSUS

AMIT S UPADHYE & BOSKY KHANNA

THE national wildlife agencies have hinted that Karnataka could regain its top spot among tiger states, surpassing Madhya Pradesh. Currently, with 524 tigers, Karnataka trails behind MP by just two, and since the last census in 2018, some tiger areas in the state are reporting phenomenal growth in tiger population.

As MP has a larger area, the tiger population density in Karnataka is higher. While a tiger needs at least 10 sqkm area as its territory, in Karnataka, a tiger has 5-6 sqkm and, in some areas, as small as 3 sqkm — a reason for higher conflict rates.

The 2018 census recorded 524 tigers in Karnataka, and an increase by 5-10 per cent is estimated. But the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) says MP has shown better relocation works while Karnataka has moved conflicting tigers to rehabilitation centres instead of areas with lesser tiger population.

Conservation activists and forest officials in Karnataka say tiger numbers may go up as the Kali landscape in Uttara Kannada district and MM Hills/Cauvery landscape in Ramanagara and Chamarajanagar districts will add to the population. Also, Bandipur Tiger Reserve, with the highest concentration of tigers, may record 200-plus tigers in the upcoming census.

NTCA experts, who recognise the 12,000 sqkm Nilgiri Biosphere spread across three states — connecting Mudumalai, Wayanad, Bandipur and Nagarhole, and houses the highest tiger and elephant populations — as the richest landscape in the world, say development works around forest areas taken up in potential tiger reserve areas will affect the tiger population.

Karnataka Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, (wildlife) Vijay Kumar Gogi says the total forest area in Karnataka is 36 lakh hectares, of which the area under five tiger reserves is four lakh hectares.

"As we hope to see a rise in tiger population, we are working on improving the habitat and prey base. The census figures also take into account the death rate, the injured and captured animals and the habitat. We have high focal points like Bandipur and Nagarhole, but there is a lot of potential in Kali, Bhadra, MM Hills, Kollegal and Cauvery wildlife sanctuary," he says.

He points out that as Karnataka houses a healthy breeding population and new stripe patterns are being accounted for in camera traps, the shrinking habitat, pressure and change on land use, rising drip irrigation cultivation, farming activities inside forest areas is a matter of worry.

BIG PICTURE

### TIGERS IN NON-TIGER AREAS

It's estimated that 30 per cent of tigers in Karnataka roam outside regular tiger reserves and national parks. Forest patches in Haliyal, Yellapur, Sirsi, Sakleshpur, Khanapur, Bannerghatta and Bisle have recorded the presence of tigers in recent camera traps by Forest Department officials. They say this is the time to concentrate on territorial divisions of Ramanagara, Bhadra, Kali and Sakleshpur where tiger signs and potential sightings have been reported.

Y V Jhala, scientist and coordinator for the tiger census, from Wildlife Institute of India (WII), says the census will be done using the M-Stripe App. "All data will be accounted for and taken up digitally. This is being done to ensure the data is accurate. Last time, when manually gathered data was tabulated, there were errors in global positioning system (GPS) coordinates," he says.

"Even though the camera trap assessment is the most accurate, ideal and reliable form of assessment, it alone cannot be done because of the cost factor involved," he says. The assessment is different as this time not just tigers' prey base is being assessed and accounted for, but even leopard and elephant populations.

"Now, the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is to take a final decision whether one collated report will be released, or three separate reports will be released," he adds.

### DELAY AND PROBLEMS

Forest Department officials say the exercise has been delayed because of bugs and technical issues in the M-Stripe App. They say there were many discrepancies in data compilation, and the app did not include many local species and was not computer-friendly.

The NTCA officials say that based on feedback, suitable corrections were made and the census should be done once in four years. "The exercise should have been started in 2021, but camera trap work itself began in October 2021. The Central Government is also keen on presenting the report at the St Petersburg Summit, scheduled in November 2022. It's also possible that the report may be released in July on International Tiger Day," says a Forest official.

Wildlife conservationist and trustee of Wildlife First, Praveen Bhargav, says the estimation of tiger numbers has become a monopoly of WII. This stifling of independent scientific research is condemnable. Eminent scientists who pioneered sampling-based techniques to estimate tigers have found that the extrapolation of tiger numbers using the index-calibration methodology by WII, is scientifically unreliable, he feels.

"To stall rigorous scrutiny, WII has not released raw data although huge sums of public money has been spent. These cast a shadow on WII estimates. The tiger's range has been shrinking due to development projects, encroachments and the unbridled grant of rights under the Forest Rights Act. Not one hectare of critical wildlife habitat, which can address these threats, has yet been notified. Tiger reserve budgets have ballooned for destructive but "lucrative" earth-moving works based on unscientific management plans. For any improvement, these need to be urgently addressed," he says.

K Ullas Karanth, Emeritus Director, Centre for Wildlife Studies, Bengaluru, says, "The tiger surveys of 2010, 2014, 2018 have gone on increasing these back-up numbers, using different statistical methods each time, claiming successful climb all the way back to 3,000 or so! This game of numbers reflects no real achievements, because if you consider there were about 2,000 tigers in the 1970s, when tiger conservation took off, it still reflects a minuscule annual growth rate of less than 1 per cent. It suffices to say we can only aspire to have a maximum of 3,500 tigers."

**STATE-WISE TIGER POPULATION OVER LAST FOUR CENSUSES**

| State | 2006 | 2010 | 2014 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Karnataka | 290 | 300 | 406 | 524 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 300 | 257 | 308 | 526 |
| Uttarakhand | 178 | 227 | 340 | 442 |
| Maharashtra | 103 | 168 | 190 | 312 |

(Source: NTCA)

**KARNATAKA TIGER RESERVE NUMBERS**

| Tiger Reserve | Census figure in 2018 | Internal study in 2021 |
|---|---|---|
| Bandipur | 173 | 200 |
| Nagarhole | 120 | 135 |
| Kali | 4 | 20 |
| Bhadra | 38 | 42 |
| BRT | 56 | ..... |
| MM Hills | 12 | 20 |
| Kudremukh | .... | 6 |
| Cauvery | 8 | ..... |
| Bannerghatta National Park | .... | 1 |

(Source: KFD)

CRIME PATROL

## Four killed in serial accident on NICE Road

Bengaluru: Four people, including two women, travelling in a car were killed, while five others were injured, in a serial accident that occurred on NICE Road near Kumaraswamy Layout on Friday night. The deceased have been identified as Abhilash (25), Mohemmed Fadzil, (25) and Jeena, (26), who were software engineers; and Shilpa (30), a school teacher. All the four hailed from Kerala. A senior police officer said the incident occurred around 9.45 pm, when an overspeeding truck rammed a hatchback, before hitting three other cars and a container truck. The four victims, who were in the hatchback, were killed on the spot, while five others in other vehicles sustained injuries.

## Bad weather forces helicopter to make emergency landing

Mysuru: A private helicopter hired by a couple from Bengaluru made an emergency landing at Kadambur in Erode district of Tamil Nadu. According to onlookers, a private helicopter with four people on board, including the pilot, made an emergency landing on a farm near Pavalakuttai village. According to the police, the couple, who had hired the helicopter from a private firm in Bengaluru, were on their way to Kochi for treatment at a hospital. Meanwhile, bad weather forced the pilot make an emergency landing at the farm, which is on the fringes of the Sathyamangalam forest. People from the surrounding vilages rushed to the spot and saw that all four people were safe.

# TTD makes appeal on darshan rescheduling

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Tirupati

THE Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has appealed to devotees, who rescheduled their darshan, not to choose any date from January 13 to 22 in view of Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam.

The TTD had offered the facility of rescheduling darshan to the devotees who booked their tickets from November 18 to December 10, 2021 and could not visit Tirumala due to heavy rain in Rayalaseema. They can visit Tirumala on any date of their choice after the 10-day Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam fete. Meanwhile, Sarva Darshan tokens for Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam will be issued to people at five counters in Tirupati from 9 am on January 10, said TTD Additional Executive Officer AV Dharma Reddy. TTD vigilance officials and Tirumala police also discussed security arrangements for Vaikunta Ekadasi.

# VIDYAGAMA MAY BE BACK, DRAFT GUIDELINES BEING PREPARED

PEARL MARIA D'SOUZA @Bengaluru

THE demands for restarting the Vidyagama programme are close to being fulfilled with the Education Department drafting an outline for alternative education for this academic year, should the Covid situation worsen in the state.

The department has created draft guidelines, Commissioner for Public Instruction Vishal R told *TNSE*. "It is created so that people are aware of what needs to be done in case the Technical Advisory Committee gives its approval, and shutdown is declared subsequently," he said.

The Department of Public Instruction has asked all schools in Bengaluru to stop classes, from pre-primary to Class 9, following which, there were demands for alternative methods of teaching, which were not necessarily the online or virtual modes.

The department's draft guidelines advise all district implementation officers to brief school heads about implementing Vidyagama. The move is to keep children from being victims of social ills, such as child marriage and child labour, and prevent further dropouts.

Students will be divided into three groups -- those with no gadgets, and hence, will be taught only offline; those with phones, but no internet; and those with internet and gadgets. Children from the last two categories will be allowed to attend online classes, if they are unable to participate in offline.

Each teacher will mentor a cohort group of 20-25 students. The groups will meet for four hours a day, daily to once a week. Schedule for the following next week will be provided and students will be guided for self-study. Doubts will be cleared too.

Self-help group volunteers will help teachers conduct classes. The volunteers' gadgets can be used to effectively teach concepts to students during the classes.

Teachers are expected to maintain a 'child profile' to oversee a progress log of students.

Local organisations are to be roped in rural areas to provide sanitisers and masks to students.

> **It is created so that people are aware of what needs to be done in case the Technical Advisory Committee gives its approval, and shutdown is declared subsequently**
> — Vishal R, Commissioner for Public Instruction

# HC junks petitions against laws levying GST on tobacco

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka High Court dismissed a batch of petitions filed by VS Products and other manufacturers of tobacco and tobacco products, challenging the constitutional validity of Section 174 of the Goods and Service Tax Act, 2017, which allowed continuation of basic excise duty on tobacco and tobacco products, along with GST.

The petitioners have also questioned Section 136 of the Finance Act, 2001, which enables the authorities to levy National Calamity Contingency Duty on tobacco and tobacco products. The order has come as a setback for manufacturers. "In fact, the choice of the category of goods as in the present case may also be influenced by the objective of discouraging consumption, and accordingly, the choice of the category of goods for the purpose of revenue generation cannot be held to be arbitrary," said Justice S Sunil Dutt Yadav, while upholding the validity of Section 174 of the GST Act and Section 136 of the Finance Act.

# Left boost for KCR's 3rd Front efforts for 'BJP-mukt' India

ENS @ Hyderabad

TRS president K Chandrasekhar Rao's efforts to build a national level anti-BJP and anti-Congress alternative gathered steam on Saturday, with the two main Left parties in the country – the CPI and CPM -- indicating that they were ready to back the Telangana CM in his endeavour.

The leaders of the two Left parties mooted for "BJP-Mukt Bharat", which was endorsed by Rao, according to sources.

The TRS president held separate meetings with CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury and CPI general secretary D Raja at Pragathi Bhavan.

Rao had invited the top leaders of the CPM and CPI, who are in Hyderabad to attend their respective national-level meetings, for discussions. The main point of discussion in the two meetings was the need to build an alternative to BJP at the national level.

Telangana CM K Chandrasekhar Rao greets his Kerala counterpart Pinarayi Vijayan, CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury and CPM leader Manik Sarkar in Hyderabad on Saturday.

"Chandrasekhar Rao stressed the need for a third alternative, as the Congress is not improving organisationally and is unable to effectively take on the BJP. We agreed to this. Our stand too is to build a secular, democratic and Left alternative to the BJP," CPI state secretary Chada Venkata Reddy, who was present in the meeting, told *TNIE*. The CPI-TRS meeting felt that the BJP was selling PSUs and damaging the basic fabric of the Constitution. "Our aim should be 'BJP Mukt Bharat'. All democratic, secular and Left forces have to unite and fight to end the wicked rule of BJP," the CPI leaders said.

The development taking place in Telangana also figured in the discussions. The controversy over the security lapse during PM Modi's recent tour of Punjab was also discussed. "As farmers were against Modi, the crowd at the public meeting, supposed to be addressed by Modi, was thin. Then, Modi enacted "security breach drama" as face-saver and returned to Delhi," the leaders said.

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ಗ್ರಾಮೀಣ ಕುಡಿಯುವ ನೀರು & ನೈರ್ಮಲ್ಯ ವಿಭಾಗ, ಧಾರವಾಡ
ಕ್ರ.ಸಂ./ಗ್ರಾ.ಕು.ನೀ.&ನೈ./ವಿಧಾ/ಸ.ಇಂ.1/ಇ-ಟೆಂಡರ/2021-22/2319 ದಿನಾಂಕ : 07-01-2022
ಸರ್ವಿಸ್ ಟೆಂಡರ ಪ್ರಕಟಣೆ ೮/2021-22 (ಇ-ಪ್ರೊಕ್ಯೂರಮೆಂಟ ಮುಖಾಂತರ ಮಾತ್ರ)
ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಮಾನ್ಯ ರಾಜ್ಯಪಾಲರ ಪರವಾಗಿ ಕಾರ್ಯನಿರ್ವಾಹಕ ಅಭಿಯಂತರರು, ಗ್ರಾಮೀಣ ನೀರು ಸರಬರಾಜು ಮತ್ತು ನೈರ್ಮಲ್ಯ ವಿಭಾಗ, ಧಾರವಾಡ ಇವರು Standard Bid Document ನಿಬಂಧನೆಗಳೊಪಟ್ಟಂತೆ ಆರ್ಹ ನೊಂದಾಯಿತ ಹಾಗೂ ಇ-ಗುತ್ತಿಗೆ ಕುರಿತು ಇ-ಪ್ರೋಕ್ಯೂರಮೆಂಟನಲ್ಲಿನಂತೆ ನೊಂದಾಯಿಸಿದ ಆರ್ಹ ಗುತ್ತಿಗೆದಾರರುಗಳಿಂದ ಈ ವಿಭಾಗ ವ್ಯಾಪ್ತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಬರುವ JJM ಯೋಜನೆ ಅಡಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಈ ಕೆಳಕಂಡ Providing Project Management Consultancy Services ಕಾಮಗಾರಿಗೆ ಇ-ಪ್ರೋಕ್ಯೂರಮೆಂಟ ಮುಖಾಂತರ ಟೆಂಡರ್‌ನ್ನು ಆಹ್ವಾನಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ.

| Sl. No | Description of Work | Consultancy Services Estimated Cost (Rs in Lakhs) | Earnest Money Deposit (Rs) | Period of Completion (in months) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Providing Project Management Consultancy services for Design, Build, Opeate & Transfer of Drinking Water Supply Scheme to 388Rural Habitation in Dhawad District, Kalaghatagi Town and 8 En-route Rural Habitations Of Saundatti Taluk, Belagavi District From Renukasagar Reservoir (Naviluttheertha Dam) (JJM/DBOT/DWD/2021-22/PMC) | Rs.1302.10 lakhs Excluding GST | 13,00,000/- | 32 Months |

ಟೆಂಡರ್ ವೇಳಾಪಟ್ಟಿ

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | E-Payment/NEFT ಮುಖಾಂತರ ಅರ್ಜಿ ಸ್ವೀಕರಿಸುವ ದಿನಾಂಕ | 29-12-2021 ರಿಂದ 28-01-2022 |
| 2 | ಶೆಡ್ಯೂಲಗಳನ್ನು Online ನಲ್ಲಿ ಬಿಡುವ ದಿನಾಂಕ | 29-12-2021 |
| 3 | ಪ್ರಿ ಬಿಡ್ ಸಭೆ ದಿನಾಂಕ, ಸಮಯ ಮತ್ತು ಸ್ಥಳ | 13-01-2022 Through V.C. the interested bidders/particpants shall have to express their interest & request for meeting id & password through the officail mail id to rwsddwd@rediffmail.com and last date for queries and clarifications 13-01-2022 at 17:30 Hrs |
| 4 | ಭರ್ತಿ ಮಾಡಿದ ಟೆಂಡರಗಳನ್ನು ಸ್ವೀಕರಿಸುವ ಕೊನೆಯ ದಿನಾಂಕ | 28-01-2022 ಸಮಯ : 16:00 |
| 5 | ತಾಂತ್ರಿಕ ಬಿಡ್ ತೆರೆಯುವ ದಿನಾಂಕ | 29-01-2022 ಸಮಯ : 16:30 |
| 6 | ಆರ್ಥಿಕ ಬಿಡ್‌ತೆರೆಯುವ ದಿನಾಂಕ | 05-02-2022 ಸಮಯ : 16:45 |

ಕಾಮಗಾರಿಗಳ ವಿವರ, ಷರತ್ತು ಹಾಗೂ ನಿಬಂಧನೆಗಳಿಗಾಗಿ ಈ ಕಛೇರಿಗೆ ಕಛೇರಿ ವೇಳೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಸಂಪರ್ಕಿಸಿ ಹಾಗೂ ವೆಬ್ ಸೈಟ http://eproc.karnataka.gov.in ಸಂಪರ್ಕಿಸಬಹುದಾಗಿದೆ.
ವಾಸಾಇ/ಧಾ/865/2021-22/ದೇಶಪಾಂಡೆ ಪಬ್ಲಿಸಿಟಿ
ಸಹಿ/- ಕಾರ್ಯನಿರ್ವಾಹಕ ಇಂಜನೀಯರರು,
ಗ್ರಾ.ಕು.ನೀ. & ನೈ. ವಿಭಾಗ, ಧಾರವಾಡ.

"I may not believe in myself, but I believe in what I'm doing

Jimmy Page

# INDIA'S PARADOX: VACANT POSTS & JOBLESSNESS

INDIA is at an intersection where the political challenge is also an economic imperative. The consequences of poor employment growth scarcely remain under the radar – they tend to surface in politics as disaffection and in the economy as lower than potential growth. What is aggravating the circumstance is a peculiar paradox — of vacant posts and joblessness.

The fundamental force of economic growth was best outlined by economist Arthur Okun in the 1960s. Okun demonstrated that when unemployment falls, the production of a country will increase and had proposed that a rise in unemployment leads to a fall in real domestic output. This column has observed in the past that while demography — essentially an increase in the number of workforce — is a driver of economic growth, it does not necessarily deliver desired destiny without policies to enable job growth.

Last fortnight saw a familiar saga play out in Madhya Pradesh. The government had invited applications for 15 posts of peon, gardener, driver and sweeper in the Gwalior district court. Over 11,000 people applied for the available positions. The required qualification for the posts — Class 8 pass and Class 10 pass to be a driver. Those who applied were graduates and post graduates, some of whom were also studying to qualify for vacancies for civil judge in the same court.

THE THIRD EYE

**SHANKKAR AIYAR**

Author of The Gated Republic, Aadhaar: A Biometric History of India's 12 Digit Revolution, and Accidental India

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The rush for a government job is not unique to Madhya Pradesh. Not long back over 90,000 hopefuls had applied for the posts of 62 peons in Uttar Pradesh. Over 3,500 of the applicants had doctorates and others with post graduate degrees. The basic qualification required was Class 5. In Maharashtra, 2.5 lakh applicants registered for MPSC exams for 290 posts — one applicant who cleared the prelims ended his life awaiting the interview.

Of course, the pandemic has made matters worse but the economy's struggle to create jobs predates it. Even as thousands struggle to find employment, central and state governments have consistently persisted with a policy of allowing posts at various levels in the government to lie vacant.

The number of vacancies in government posts which are updated regularly in Parliament merit attention. Consider the vacancies in the central government. In July 2021, the government informed Parliament that over 8.72 lakh posts were vacant across various levels in the central government — of these, over 2.79 lakh posts were vacant in just one department which is the railways.

How are the state governments doing? Not any better would be the short answer. The bitter irony of the situation is that while graduates and post graduates are applying for jobs of peons, posts in schools and universities lie vacant. The data is shocking. There are over 10 lakh government schools — mostly funded and run by state governments. The sanctioned strength for teachers is 61.84 lakh. Of these, one in six or over 10.6 lakh posts are vacant — over 2.75 lakh in Bihar, 2.17 lakh in UP and over 91,000 in MP.

Consider the capacity in ensuring law and order. One of five police posts in the country is lying vacant. The sanctioned strength of police personnel across all states is 26.23 lakh whereas the actual strength is 20.91 lakh leaving over 5.32 lakh posts vacant. On the rostrum of poor performers are Uttar Pradesh with 1.11 lakh vacancies, West Bengal with 55,000 vacant posts and Bihar with over 47,000 unfilled positions.

The pandemic, particularly the second wave, has highlighted the inadequacies of public-funded health care in rural areas. As India gears up to face the Omicron wave, a moot question is how well-staffed the healthcare system is across states. In December 2021, the government citing rural health statistics informed Parliament that over 47,000 critical posts — of which over 24,000 are for doctors and specialists — along with over 10,000 posts of support staff are lying vacant at primary health centres in rural India. As I have chronicled in my book '*The Gated Republic*', the failure to invest in critical sectors of education, health and security has consequences for the larger political economy.

It has been argued that the state governments are constrained by their revenue models and lack the funds to employ people and fill the vacancies. It is equally true that the budgets of the state governments do not quite reflect the hierarchy of priorities and prudence. It is useful to note that no economy has arrived into the developed club without spending on human infrastructure and that includes China.

The essential formula of growth is C+G+I+NX — Consumption plus Government spending plus Investment plus Net Exports. Consumption can grow only on the back of new and rising incomes. Yes, the government has subscribed to the received wisdom that it must lead in investing for growth — and that the private sector, constrained by expectations of profit, will follow. But the premise that the former will lead to the latter requires a reset of legislative and regulatory conditions. As research by Aventis Regtech shows, entrepreneurs are haunted by over 1,500 laws and over 69,000 compliances to follow.

The foundational proposition of Okun where growth rises with employment demands that government create an ecosystem which propels job creation.

# LISTEN TO ELECTRON & HIS BROTHERS

POINT OF VIEW

**T J S GEORGE**

THE lawyer's name is Electron. That is right, a practising lawyer whose name is Electron. If any confirmation is required, please meet his brothers, Proton and Neutron. These are real names of real people. Of course, they are in Kerala, a place where impossible things turn possible.

It was not an eccentric desire to be different that made K Arjunachari name his sons in unconventional style. He had two reasons, both noble in nature. He knew the way atoms bonded together to form molecules. Stick an oxygen atom between two hydrogen atoms and you get $H_2O$, also known as water. He wanted his boys to stick together like atoms.

The other reason was nationalistic in nature. He had worked in paramilitary forces and developed clear ideas about a strong and progressive India. He saw caste as a curse. The names he gave his children mocked at caste. Would anyone ask whether Proton was a Brahmin? If some assumed that Electron was SC/ST, who would bother?

What is reassuring is that Arjunachari was not an exception. In Salem, Tamil Nadu, V A Mohan was guided by similar ideals. He was the Communist Party's zilla secretary. He found it proper to name his sons A M Socialism, A M Communism and A M Leninism.

It is possible that the sons could have felt embarrassed by their names. But the records show they were in fact proud of them. In due course, A M Leninism named his son A L Marxism. The family was waiting for a new-generation daughter they could name Cubaism.

In June last year, Socialism got married. The bride was from a Congress family. That did not affect the flow of history. When a daughter was born to Socialism, they took a detour and named her Mamata Banerjee. Others in the family had names like Moscow, Vietnam and Czechoslovakia. The original Mamata Banerjee said nothing about the naming phenomenon. She could not have objected to her name being used the way legends such as Vietnam and Moscow were being used.

Internet is full of names that are listed as favourites among Indians. According to one, the hottest names for boys are Arjun, Aum and Ishan. A separate list credited to Pop Culture has Ari, Dev and Jaiden as top favourites. (Dev? Good old Dev Anand had made that single syllable a household favourite not long ago.)

Names can sometimes convey wrong impressions, leading to their bearers having a tough time. I am myself an example. That my name is obviously foreign in origin is bad enough. It is worse that the name puts a religious brand on my forehead. I practise no religion. Indeed, I happen to believe that all religions have become commercial enterprises. God is merely a commodity to be traded. It is a high-value commodity and can lead to enormous profits. Look around and you can see outstanding examples of God-traders and their successes.

**Despite all the educational and cultural advances made by our country, religion plays a decisive role in our everyday lives, not to mention our politics. It cannot be otherwise when religions and anointed religious leaders are accepted as legitimate authorities in political affairs.**

But it does not matter that I have these different viewpoints. To the casual onlooker, I am simply a follower of the religion my name represents, restricted to the boundaries of that religion and incapable of seeing beyond. How prejudices shape our lives. How much easier life would have been if I was named Priyadarshan or Santosh or Jnanadesinganacharyadas?

The reality is that a good deal of surface appearances has a determining effect on our opinions and our lives. The influence of religion is superimposed over these. Despite all the educational and cultural advances made by our country, religion plays a decisive role in our everyday lives, not to mention our politics. It cannot be otherwise when religions and anointed religious leaders are accepted as legitimate authorities in political affairs.

Time was when "modern" European countries were under the thumbs of bishops and cardinals. It was worse in Japan. For more than 18 centuries, Shintoism has played a central role in that country's public life. In 1997, the Supreme Court there ruled that religion and politics should remain separate as decreed in the 1947 constitution. The good thing is that in India, although the influence of religion is strong and widespread, its hold on politics has not been strong enough to influence the affairs of the state. Even where the BJP is in power, there are limits it cannot cross.

Clearly, the likes of Electron, Proton and Neutron have won their case. Religion is contained; it is unable to change the course of history in any substantive manner. And that enables all citizens to join in saying 'Jai Hind'.

# MAIM AND TAME HATE MONETISING TECH MOGULS

POWER & POLITICS

**PRABHU CHAWLA**

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Follow him on Twitter @PrabhuChawla

A press of a button. A high-tech algorithm. A malicious login. These were the doorway to the auction of conscience last week when the hammer of hate came down on the bazaar block of technology. Sulli deals and Bulli Bai detonated in the online space, aimed at communal polarisation and humiliation of Muslim women whose doctored pictures inviting buyers were posted.

The same week the IT ministry blocked a Telegram channel that shared similar photos of Hindu women. Instead of going after the real criminals, the state acted politically. The BJP-run state government went after the minorities and the non-BJP administrations hunted saffronwalas. In the process, the reputation of young innocent girls and boys were ruined for working as paid agents of power pashas. These young delinquents wouldn't have damaged the social fabric so much, if they could not have accessed the tools that amplified their misdeeds.

India has a record of communal incidents, which never got national or global attention earlier, lacking technology's reach. Now, technology is the engine of the national hate factory. It is also good business and a powerful weapon to enable targeted attacks whether it is in Washington or Washim.

However, technology titans are above authority. They can only be politely requested or directed to take down offensive and illegal information disseminated through their platforms. Both Sulli Deals and Bully Bai apps were uploaded on GitHub. Since Microsoft owns it, India has desisted from taking legal action. After all, its market capitalization is around $2.30 trillion — almost equal to our GDP.

Because GitHub is US based, it is not accountable to Indian laws. Authorities can only seek information from it through official American channels. Nevertheless, GitHub claims that "it does not allow threats of violence, hate speech and discrimination, harassment, impersonation, doxing and invasion of privacy, and sexually obscene content among other things." But it has no mechanism to prevent the posting of objectionable material on its platform. It takes action only after moral desecration has happened, like it did in India.

IT minister Ashwini Vaishnaw was doing damage control by only politely nudging GitHub which hosts over 200 million repositories of code involving 73 million developers. The source code of Aarogya Setu is on it. GitHub is only a tiny section of the gargantuan app market. The massive surge in mobile app downloads continues with 218 billion apps worth $20 billion downloaded last year.

If a relatively unknown GitHub can be misused by hate hawkers to cause social upheaval, imagine the damage which Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and LinkedIn have wreaked so far and will do in the future. Collectively, they own liquid assets worth one third of the global wealth. They are the creation of the state, which is now helplessly facing their arrogance and suffering inflicted by their global activities.

For them, money matters more than morals. By seducing the tech-illiterate political leadership and vulnerable youth with mesmerizing tools of engagement, they set the rules of the game. For almost a decade, not one powerful nation would gauge the enormity of their success. They spread their influence even faster than Omicron. Today, they are the establishment, and rulers are dancing to their tune. None of them have been hauled up by prosecuting agencies for letting terrorists, misogynists and malice mongers use their platforms with immunity. After all, every word posted on each platform is worth a fortune if disseminated before being blocked. Look at the global reach of social media giants:

### WhatsApp

With over two billion monthly active users, it is the most contagious social networking tool and the fastest means of communication between communities across continents. Founded in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum as a cheaper alternative to SMS, it was acquired by Facebook, now Meta, in 2014 for $19 billion. During that year, its revenues were barely $1.30 million while currently it earns over $8 billion, thanks to its massive consumer base. According to published data, every fourth WhatsApp user is an Indian — 480 million of two billion odd customers. WhatsApp has become the most effective and lethal weapon to destroy reputations and create social strife.

### Facebook

WhatsApp is just not the only tech driven monster endangering global social harmony. With over 2.70 billion users, Facebook allows maximum reach at minimum cost. Over 98 per cent of users have Facebook app on their mobiles. While owner Mark Zuckerberg takes it in, the users acquire the digital muscle to name, main and defame. In 2009, Facebook earned $800 million. Last year, it ended with over $85 billion in its pocket. Zuckerberg is a darling of the rich and is feted by Presidents and Prime Ministers. In India, around 360 million people use Facebook. And some of them have used it to reap political dividends by divisive content.

### Twitter

On March 21, 2006 when Twitter founder Jack Dorsey sent his first tweet into cyberspace, he never imagined that his blue bird could cause a bloodbath in the communication community. Fifteen years later, Twitter is the third largest social networking platform in the US with 400 million users and a market cap of around $46 billion, calculated on the monestisation of just 200 million users. India has over 25 million active Twitter accounts. Of all the SM platforms, Twitter is used the most by political leaders, social activists, anarchists, communalists, illiberals and terrorists. There is hardly a leader or organisation which doesn't have a Twitter handle. It is through Twitter that most fake news and hate speeches are delivered, making it currently the most divisive platform. The company blocked Donald Trump's account only after it figured that he was on his way out.

### YouTube

With over 2.3 billion people accessing YouTube for videos on a variety of topics from potato to politics, it is the cheapest internet tool for both young and old, famous and the infamous, sycophants and psychopaths, anarchists and monarchists, liberals and illiberals to control the narrative in their own style. Google bought it for $1.65 billion in 2005 and is in the clover for around $20 billion annually. It is the most powerful alternative to traditional electronic media. YouTube's algorithm has been accused for pushing its users to videos that promote conspiracies and disruptive tendencies. A critic warned that it could be one of the most powerful radicalising instruments of the 21st century. In India, it has been grossly misused by political parties and extremist organisations by financing their followers to work as Youtubers.

The triumph of technology has made certainly the world a better place. But it is also a dark angel that will finally unleash an Armageddon of hate. While tech monarchs with their monopoly and money minting machines relax in their luxurious silos, the growing misuse of their instruments of miscommunication would ultimately reach their doorsteps too. An unequal and divided humanity would only breed rebels in the long run.

Unless the technological loopholes are plugged in time and Titans tamed, all of Earth would be pushed into a dystopian war that so far happens only in Hollywood action movies. Judgement Day is coming and in the digital apocalypse, no one will be spared.

## QUOTE CORNER

It would seem to me that the Kazakh authorities and government certainly have the capacity to deal appropriately with protests... So it's not clear why they feel the need for any outside assistance. So we're trying to learn more about it.

**Antony Blinken,** US Secretary of State

There is nothing here, no fact, except the hysteria of the opposition. There is no Pegasus case, no surveillance. No Pegasus, no services, no secretly obtained information played any role in the 2019 election campaign.

**Jaroslaw Kaczynski,** Poland Deputy PM

I am now giving orders to the (village chiefs) to look for those persons who are not vaccinated and request them to stay put. If they refuses then, the officials are empowered to arrest such persons.

**Rodrigo Duterte,** Philippines President

## MAILBAG

WRITE TO letters@newindianexpress.com

### TNPSC bill is a boon

This is with reference to the report *'Now, recruitment for PSUs, govt corporations also through TNPSC'* (Jan 8). This bill ensures not only government jobs without bribery but also can select skilled persons for the posts. On the contrary the DMK government is in favour of the competitive exams for posts in quasi-government entities, why does it oppose NEET exams which ensure skilled medical professionals?

S Anantharaj Abraham, Chennai

### No room for blame game

It raises apprehensions on the prime minister's team that why they decided to travel by road witnessing the fact that maintaining security for such a long haul journey is an onerous task? It requires thorough investigation and repurposing of the SPG. Undoubtedly, the security of the Prime Minister ought not to be compromised. That said, the Punjab government and police ought not to be blamed outrightly. The security lapse is the aftermath of abrupt decision making at the eleventh hour.

Aanya Singhal, Noida

### Unenviable healthcare staff

This refers to the editorial *'When hospitals turn Covid clusters'* (Jan 8). One heart goes for the healthcare workers across the country who are fighting the pandemic tooth and nail themselves, but have a noble task of saving other human lives affected by the third wave. They are in an unenviable position. That many frontline workers do not want to get tested fearing it will affect the healthcare system in the economy is a difficult pill to swallow. New year frolics too was foiled due to the pandemic. One does not know how many waves people have to put up with. When will the mask culture end?

S Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

### Gujarat kite fest cancelled

The most vibrant and multi-coloured celebration of Gujarat, International Kite Festival, has been officially cancelled due the pandemic and spiking cases of the Omicron variant. The kite festival here is most popular festival of Gujarat next only to Navaratri. Traditionally known as Uttarayan or Makar Sankranti, the kite festival celebrates the departure of winter season.

Arsaban Patel, Gujarat

### MP losing tiger numbers

It is rather sad and unfortunate that Madhya Pradesh, entitled the 'Tiger State in India' has last as many as 85 big cats, including 32 cubs in a span of four years. Madhya Pradesh has traditionally been the home turf for our national animal for long. For quite a while, it lost its glory only to regain the tag of being the country's tiger state in 2018 tiger census, according to which it had as many as 526 tigers, two more than Karnataka. The central Indian state has six tiger reserves including Kanha, Pench, Bandhavgarh and Sanjay Dubri. Kanha is also one of the largest national parks in the country. All-out efforts are needed not only to maintain the tiger population but also to increase it in future.

R Sampath, Chennai

### Fillip to rainwater harvesting

In a smart move, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin has allotted ₹801 crore from State Disaster Response Fund to repair and restore property in flood affected areas as well as for relief — even before the arrival of relief funds from the Centre. We all appreciate this move. We also like to remind the chief minister to implement rainwater harvesting along with these efforts and not to allow all rainwater to go to drains. Rainwater plants should be installed because it can save quite a large quantity on a large scale and should be compelled to implement this scheme in new buildings. If implemented, it is a better way of saving water to avoid water cuts. Once the relative advantages are properly understood by everyone, old building will also add rainwater harvesting systems.

V Venkitasubramanian, Coimbatore

THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS

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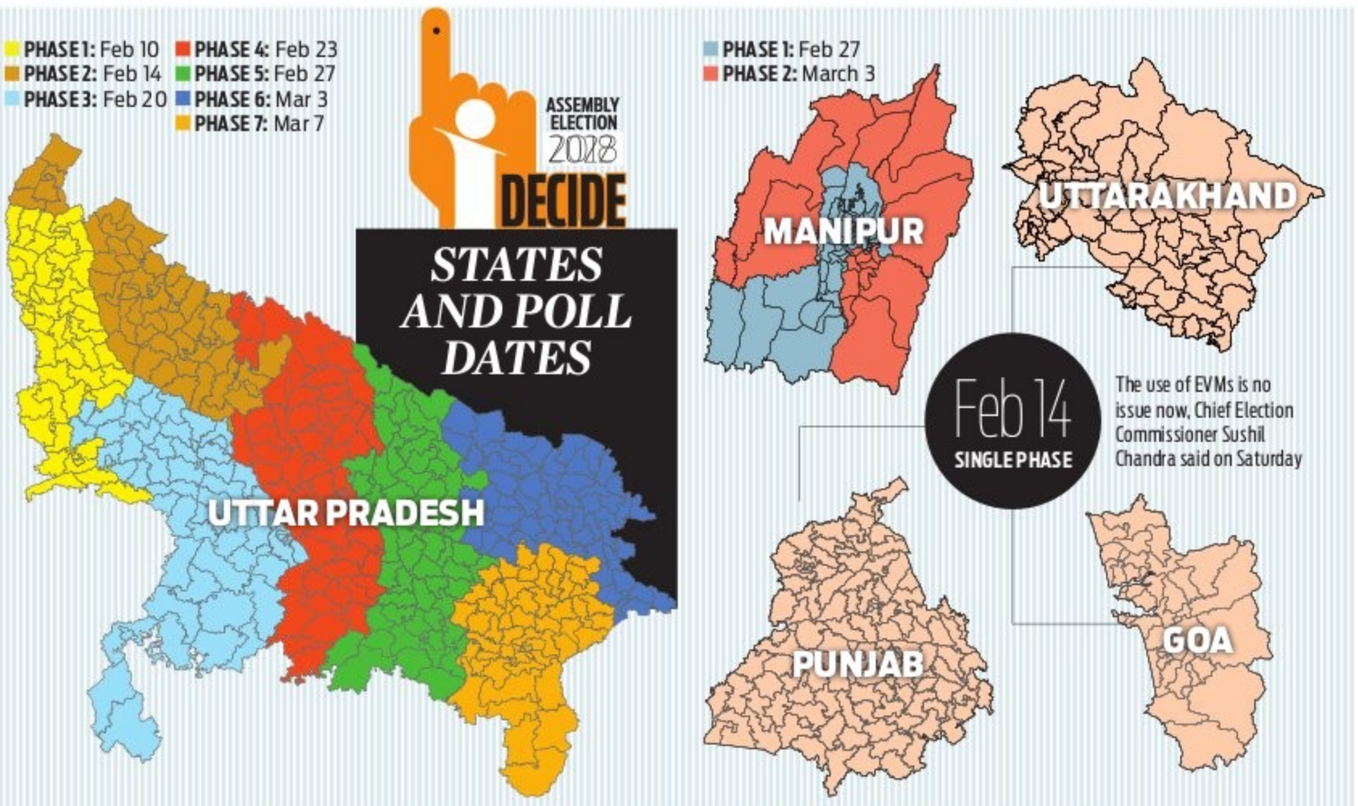
**TWEETS OF THE DAY**

**Rahul Gandhi** @Rahul Gandhi
#BulliBaiApp Seeing the young age of accused in the case, the whole country was asking, where does so much hatred come from?

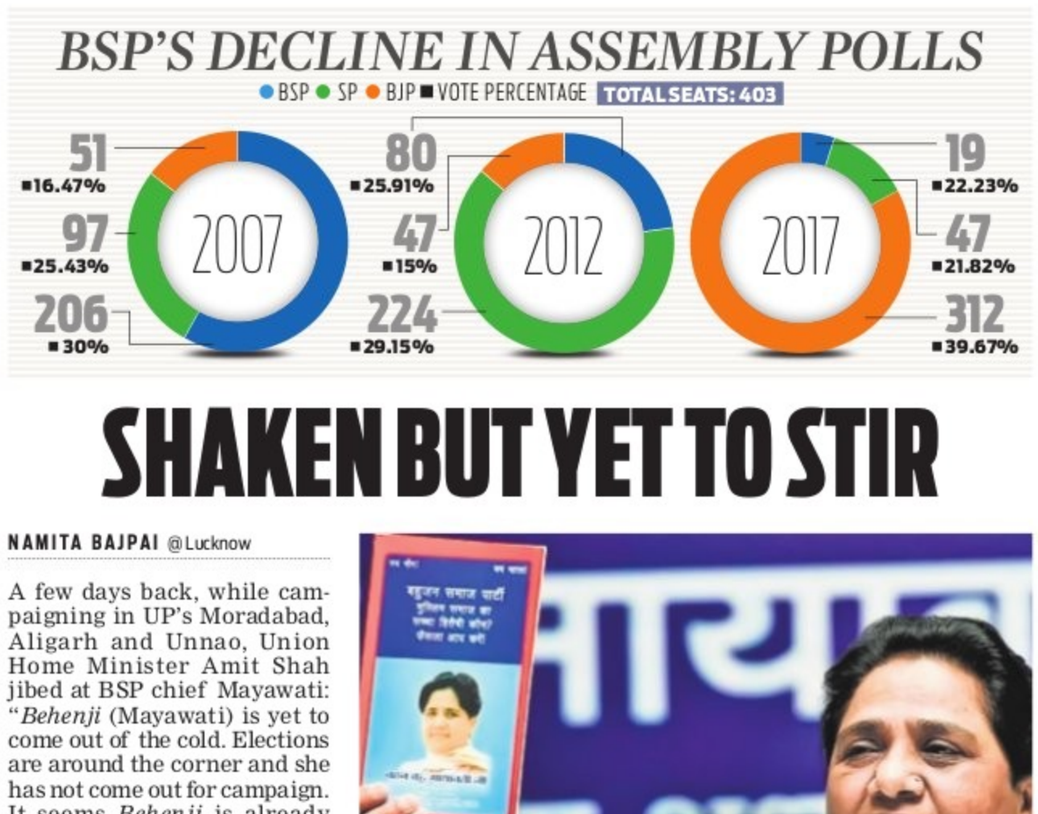
**Mahua Moitra** @MahuaMoitra
FCRA license for Missionaries of Charity reinstated. International pressure? Love & charity prevailed? Or fear of losing Christian votes?

**Sanjay Singh AAP** @SanjayAzadSin
Shame on such a system where only victim has to die. Arun Gupta went to to file FIR, but did not know that Yogi's police would beat him.




**MORE POLLING STATIONS AS CAUTION AGAINST VIRUS**

With the announcement of schedule for the Assembly polls in five states, the election officials in these states are gearing up for conducting hassle-free polling amid the rising Covid-19 cases. To ensure voters are able to maintain social distance, the EC has increased the number of polling stations. In UP the EC has made 18.49% increase in polling stations, from 1,47,148 in 2017 to 1,74,351 in 2022. Similarly, in Punjab the figure has been increased from 22,600 to 24,689 (9.24% rise); in Goa, from 1,642 to 1,722 (4.87%); in Manipur, from 2,794 to 2,959 (5.91%) and in Uttarakhand, from 10,854 to 11,647 (7.31%). As many as 18.34 crore voters, including 8.55 crore women, in these states are eligible to exercise their franchise. Meanwhile, the Centre has sent 150 companies of Central Armed Paramilitary Forces to UP.




# SHAKEN BUT YET TO STIR

**NAMITA BAJPAI** @Lucknow

A few days back, while campaigning in UP's Moradabad, Aligarh and Unnao, Union Home Minister Amit Shah jibed at BSP chief Mayawati: "*Behenji* (Mayawati) is yet to come out of the cold. Elections are around the corner and she has not come out for campaign. It seems *Behenji* is already afraid." The BSP chief retorted by saying the BSP has its own style of functioning and it does not want to "copy" others.

The exchange highlighted the former CM's discomfiture at a time when principal contenders to UP's power are firing on all cylinders. Take a look at how they are straining their every nerve: Yogi Adityanath and the entire top saffron leadership is busy shoring up the party prospects, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav is taking out his Vijay Rath Yatra criss-crossing the state and Priyanka is focusing on her *'ladki hoon lad sakti hoon* (I am a girl, I can fight)' campaign.

Where's Bahujan Samaj Party? The fact is Mayawati is yet to step out to take her party's poll campaign forward. She seems to be missing in action.

BSP leaders, however, assert they believe in door-to-door contact as the most effective means to mobilising the voters during the election.

"This is better than splurging on holding big rallies," said a BSP leader. Except for some pressers in Lucknow, Mayawati hasn't done much so far. "She will be stepping out soon," says her supporter.

A top BSP leader said the party was focusing on all reserved seats at present. "SC Mishra ji (party general secretary) is heading the party campaign district-wise. As soon as the schedule of the programme is over, *behenji* (Mayawati) will step out. However, she is in touch with zonal coordinators and party workers," said a senior BSP leader.

Analysts believe Mayawati is confident of her dedicated voter-base. She is focusing mainly on re-stitching the social engineering formula around Dalit-Brahmin combination that had brought her to power with 206 seats in 2007.

Since then, however, the party's vote share has been dwindling from 30 per cent in 2007 to 25 per cent in 2012 and 22 per cent in 2017 assembly elections. "The gradual decline of the BSP has made the UP fight more of a straight one, between the BJP and the SP with most BSP faces turning to the SP," says Prof AK Mishra, a political analyst.

In the 2017 polls, when the opposition stood decimated, the BSP won only 19 seats out of 403, registering a massive decline from 80 seats in 2012.

Even in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the party failed to impress the voters — in 2014, it could not open its account while in 2019, with its 'grand alliance' with the Samajwadi Party in place, the BSP could win only 10 seats.

The upcoming Assembly election appears to be more difficult for Mayawati as many of her close aides have left the BSP camp.

The party's decline is largely attributed to the exodus of its bigwigs in the last couple of years. Those who left the party for greener pastures accuse her of having lost touch with the masses. Many of them cry foul over the way money was demanded for party funds at the instance of the party chief.

Mayawati, who has been a four-time UP chief minister, suddenly seems to be incapable of giving even a semblance of a fight to her rivals. The party lost the Jalalpur seat in Ambedkarnagar by-election and its number in the Assembly came down to 18 in 2019. Out of them, eight have joined SP in the last few months. The rest also followed suit recently.

Ironically, many leaders who were associated with the party since its birth were expelled in June 2021 for "anti-party activities."

The party with 19 MLAs is now left with just three in the UP Assembly.

# Yogi eyes 300+ seats, SP sees change

All parties promise to abide by EC norms, Akhilesh wants panel to go strict against BJP

**NAMITA BAJPAI** @Lucknow

MAJOR political players in Uttar Pradesh, including the ruling BJP, Samajwadi Party, Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), have welcomed the seven-phase schedule announced by the Election Commission (EC) for the upcoming Assembly polls in the state.

Significantly, in the wake of the unprecedented surge in Covid-19 cases, the EC has banned road shows, padyatra and physical rallies by political parties in the five poll-bound states till January 15.

While welcoming the poll schedule, UP CM Yogi Adityanath exuded confidence that his party would repeat its 2017 performance by winning 300 plus seats and would form the "double engine" government again in UP.

Senior BJP leader and UP cabinet minister Siddharthnath Singh said the party would follow the EC guidelines in letter and spirit. The saffron party leaders also claimed had no problem with digital campaigns as even "their grassroots workers had been in the practice of digital dialogue and communication for long".

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav assured his party would abide by the guidelines laid by the EC. He claimed the people of UP were waiting for the change of dispensation in 2022. "These dates will spell a major change in UP. However, the EC should get stricter with ruling BJP and ensure that they followed the guidelines," he said.

Just before the announcement of the poll schedule, the SP chief had said that if physical rallies would be banned, then the EC should provide the party with funds to manage the digital infrastructure. "The BJP has had a digital infrastructure for a long time, unlike other political parties. We will request the EC to strengthen the digital platforms of other parties so that they can come in a position to compete with BJP," said Akhilesh Yadav. He also urged the ECI to be watchful of the hate speeches delivered by the BJP leaders.

Similarly, the BSP, which has been waiting party for chief Mayawati to hold rallies, would feel restricted in the wake of the new guidelines. However, BSP leader Dharamveer said the party was well prepared to fight the polls. "We will comply with the EC guidelines strictly as we have seen the dance of death and destruction during the second wave of the pandemic," said the BSP leader.

Congress UP unit chief Ajay Kumar Lallu also claimed his party was all prepared to give a tough fight to the rivals in battleground UP.

**The tendency of the ruling party to violate the model code of conduct is becoming fatally common, which needs to be given due attention**

—Mayawati, BSP

**I appeal to the people to participate in the carnival of democracy with full spirit while at the same time observing all Covid related protocols**

—Amarinder Singh, PLC

**People of Goa understand the need for a stable government, and their vote was not for a BJP candidate but for a stable and efficient government**

—Pramod Sawant, BJP

# Goa, Manipur, Uttarakhand parties gear up for single-phase contest

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**
@Dehradun/Mumbai/Guwahati

POLITICAL parties in the other three poll-bound states — Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur — too welcomed the announcement of election schedule and expressed hope of getting the mandate while government and election commission officials expressed confidence regarding smooth conduct of the entire exercise.

Sowjanya, the chief electoral officer of Uttarakhand, said, "Arrangements for smooth elections with appropriate Covid safety measures are in place."

Leaders of political parties said they were ready to comply with Covid-19 safety norms. The state government had on Friday decided to ban political rallies and demonstration till January 16.

In Goa, CM Pramod Sawant, while welcoming the poll schedule, said that he was there not to rule but to serve the people. "I request people to give us another opportunity to serve the people of Goa again. We will launch our manifesto on January 20. Candidates will be declared only after party parliamentary board's decision," Sawant said. He claimed to have fulfilled "80 per cent promises" made in the last elections.

In Manipur, both BJP and its ally, the National People's Party, as well as Congress said they had no issues with the poll date and stressed the need to follow Covid protocol.

All the three parties favoured smaller election rallies. "Smaller rallies will help us control poll-related expenditure and put up a fight," Congress spokesman K Debabrata said. NPP state general secretary Sheikh Noorul Hassan said: "Bigger rallies affect the psychological belief of voters."

# Punjab Oppn ready to end 'misrule'

**HARPREET BAJWA** @Chandigarh

SLAMMING the ruling Congress for 'misgovernance' both Aam Aadmi Party and Shiromani Akali Dal claimed they will independently form the next government in Punjab. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi claimed he worked days and night to best of his abilities.

AAP Punjab president and Parliament member Bhagwant Mann, while welcoming the Election Commission's announcement of poll dates, claimed that his party was amply prepared for the contest. Mann appealed to the people of Punjab to "write down their destiny with their own hands on February 14 to put Punjab on the track of prosperity, peace and harmony again".

Mann said voters of the state should cast their votes to "get rid of those who have been looting Punjab for their vested interests." He claimed the people of Punjab have made up their mind to form the AAP government. "This is evident from the fact that the people are reaching out in large numbers with their own resources and are generously supporting Kejriwal's guarantees in the events being held by the party candidates. The results on March 10 will announce the victory of the people of Punjab," he said.

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal hailed the announcement of Assembly polls and said the people of the state will immediately heave a big sigh of relief.

"This signals the end of anarchy, chaos, confusion and misgovernance in Punjab," he said. "The present rulers have reduced governance to a circus joke. People will heave a sigh of relief that it is over and the state will go back to the serious business of governance by the SAD-BSP alliance," he said.

Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi said his party would conduct the campaign as per the instructions of the Election Commission. "I have been the CM for 111 days I thank the people of Punjab and Congress. I worked to best of my abilities," he said. When asked whether he will be the CM face of the Congress, Channi said this decision would be taken by the party high command. "Whatever feedback the public gives the party, a decision will be taken accordingly," he said.

Punjab BJP chief Ashwani Sharma said his party is fully prepared to contest the elections in the state. Sharma said the days of "mafia rule" will soon be over and CM Charanjit Singh Channi, along with Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu, will be "routed".

# TMC WORKING ON GRAND ALLIANCE IN GOA?

**NAUSHAD BIJAPUR** @Belagavi

A grand alliance of the "like-minded" political parties against the ruling BJP is taking shape in Goa ahead of the Assembly elections scheduled to be held on Valentine's Day in the coastal state. Given the latest political developments in Goa, the TMC, MGP, Goa Forward and Congress are in the last stage of working out a Mahagathbandhan aimed at defeating the ruling BJP.

A tweet by TMC Goa incharge Mahua Moitra, tagged to Congress, GFP and MGP, stating that "Rest assured, we the AITC will do everything possible to defeat BJP in Goa and TMC Chief Mamata Banerjee has done it in the past and will not shy away from walking an extra mile in Goa too,' has woken up the Congress leadership.

Already, the Congress ally, Goa Forward has tweeted underlining the need for a joint opposition of like-minded parties like Congress, MGP, TMC and Goa Forward to defeat the BJP. Sources said, several leaders of the Congress including Goa Congress in-charge P Chidambaram, Mohua Moitra of TMC and leaders of MGP and Goa Forward are keen to forge a grand alliance at the earliest.

Reacting to Moitra's tweet on the possible grand alliance, P Chidambaram said today in Goa,₹₹I think the Congress is capable of defeating the BJP. But if any party wishes to support the Congress, why should I say no. Let's see what the official offer (from TMC) is."

Chidambaram said he had read about TMC's offer for an alliance with the Congress and other parties in the newspapers. He said, ₹₹Let us wait for the official version."

Highly placed sources in Goa said, the Congress would waste no time in forging an alliance with TMC and MGP once it got an offer from the TMC officially.

What could be the terms and conditions of a grand alliance if all the four parties join hands was something not clear as yet, said sources, adding that leaders from all the parties would have to deliberate on sharing of seats in the event of a pre-poll alliance.

However, the Congress party has announced tickets for nine key seats in Goa and undecided about the remaining 31 seats.

The AAP campaign is in full swing as the party leadership is confident to bounce back despite a white wash it suffered in the last assembly elections in Goa. It is unlikely that AAP may join the grand alliance as its leaders are non-committal on the issue with other parties.

A political analyst Kishore Naik Gaonkar feels the grand alliance could effectively avoid the split of the traditional Congress votes in many of the 40 constituencies and may certainly land the ruling BJP in trouble. The political equations would change totally ahead of the polls with alliance placed comfortably, he added.

# Missionaries of Charity's FCRA licence restored

NEW DELHI: The Union Home Ministry has restored the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act registration of the Missionaries of Charity, days after revoking it following some "adverse inputs". A home ministry official said that with the restoration of the FCRA licence, the Kolkata-based famed organisation will be able to receive foreign fundings and can also spend the money lying in the banks. The Missionaries of Charity did not officially comment on the report, but an official, who requested anonymity, confirmed that the MHA indeed restored FCRA licence from January 7 and "we are happy with the development".

# Punjab gets new DGP, days after lapse in security

**HARPREET BAJWA** @Chandigarh

THREE days after the prime minister's convoy was stranded on a flyover in Ferozepur district in a major security lapse, Viresh Kumar Bhawra, a 1987 batch IPS officer, was appointed as the new Punjab director general of police, the state's third in three months, replacing Siddharth Chattopadhyaya.

His term will be for a minimum of two years, the state home department said in its order. Sources said the UPSC on Tuesday held a meeting in which it empanelled three officers for the top post including Bhawra and Dinkar Gupta, who was the DGP when Amarinder Singh was the CM.

Chattopadhyaya is considered close to Punjab Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu, who had pressured the government to appoint him. Although officially Bhawra's posting was not linked to the security breach, Chattopadhyaya's continuation had become untenable after the Wednesday incident when protesting farmers stopped the PM's convoy.

The change at the top came on a day when the Punjab government transferred nine police officers, including Ferozepur SSP Harmandeep Singh Hans.

**RARE LANGURS FOUND DEAD**

Carcasses of five Capped Langurs, which fall in the 'rare' category, was found in Bihali reserve forest in Assam's Biswanath district bordering Arunachal Pradesh, a forest officer said on Saturday

15 INCHES OF SNOW IN FRESH FALL AT SHOPIAN

| INDIA | Max | Min | | Max | Min |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ahmedabad | 26 | 11 | Mumbai | 28 | 18 |
| Bhopal | 22 | 14 | Panaji | 31 | 20 |
| Jaipur | 22 | 09 | Patna | 25 | 13 |
| Amritsar | 14 | 12 | Lucknow | 21 | 14 |
| Chennai | 30 | 23 | Port Blair | 31 | 25 |
| Kolkata | 27 | 17 | Imphal | 21 | 04 |
| Srinagar | 05 | -01 | Chandigarh | 17 | 12 |

# CREEPY-CRAWLY RATE OF HOSPITALISATION

Admission percentage of active cases decreases in most states, doctors observe fewer instances of severe illness

ANKITA UPADHYAY, NAMITA BAJPAI, ANURAAG SINGH, HARPREET BAJWA, RAJESH ASNANI @ New Delhi/ Lucknow/Bhopal/ Chandigarh /Jaipur

AS the third wave of Covid-19 powered by the Omicron variant sends numbers soaring across India, data from government hospitals of the states reveal interesting trends.

In Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, bed occupancy in hospitals and Covid care centres has increased. Hospitalisation has gone up also in Maharashtra, Punjab, Bihar and Gujarat. Weekend and night curfews are in force, the fear is rising. Metros like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bengaluru are witnessing a rapid rise in cases and restrictions. There is a feeling that health infrastructure in these places is in for another serious challenge.

However, percentage of active cases admitted to hospitals has decreased in many parts. In Bihar, it has dipped from 47.72% to 1.9% in about a week. While over 65% of active cases were being treated in hospitals in Rajasthan on December 29, it came down to 2.37% on January 6. Experts believe vaccination has played a part in lowering hospitalisation.

In keeping with the Union health ministry's recent advise, more and more patients with mild symptoms are in home quarantine. In Maharashtra, where authorities are contemplating a lockdown in mid-January, home isolation went up from about 1.22 lakh on December 25 to 5.85 lakh on January 6. Hospitalisations rose from 905 to 1,368 in this period.

Delhi has seen cases skyrocket. But hospitalisation rate compared to the number of active cases has decreased, from 6.6% on January 1 to 4.81% to January 7. According to Dr Suresh Kumar, director of Lok Nayak Hospital, mostly those with comorbidities and not vaccinated are getting admitted. "Cases are mild so far and not many patients have required oxygen support," he said.

In UP, the current surge is faster than the second wave but hospitalisation is not that high. "Health department data show the rate of hospitalisation during the second wave was 9%. It's about 2% now," said a heath department official.

In Madhya Pradesh, hospitalisation rose by 174% between December 29 and January 6. But this could be misleading, considering that active cases shot up by 706% in this period. On January 6, of the 56,171 hospital beds for Covid patients, 200 (0.36%) were occupied.

According to Indore-based chest physician Ravi Dosi, there is a marked difference between the second and third waves. "Just 3-5% needed hospitalisation. Of those, only around 1% were on oxygen or other critical care support. In the initial phases of the second wave, almost 30-40% needed oxygen and other support."

Cases are soaring in Punjab, but hospitalisation rate with respect to active cases came down from over 6% on December 30 to 1.01% on January 6.

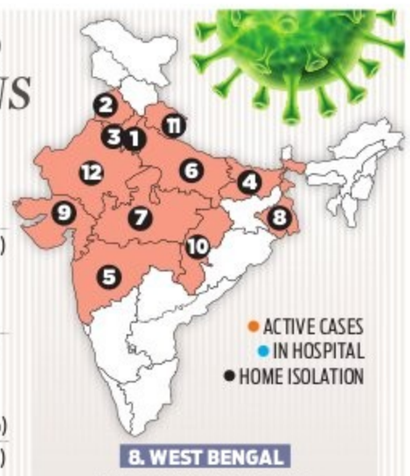
The state government had increased bed capacity fearing for worse, but only about 1% of them are occupied.

"If patients do not require oxygen, we ask them to be in home isolation. We hardly have beds without oxygen. Bed occupancy is low at present but beds have been added keeping in mind the projected caseload," said Dr Rajesh Bhaskar, Punjab's Covid-19 nodal officer.

Despite a spike in numbers, Rajasthan has seen a drastic fall in hospitalisation. Dr Rateesh Sareen, Consultant, Pathology, and Deputy Director Legal at Jaipur's Santokba Durlabhji Memorial Hospital, believes Omicron is following the trend noticed in South Africa, UK and US. "It's more contagious but what's assuring is that ICU admission, oxygen-bed occupancy and hospitalisation have been less so far compared to previous waves. Most are in home isolation."

*Inputs from Ramashankar (Patna), Sudhir Suryawanshi (Mumbai), Ejaz Kaiser (Raipur), Pranab Mondal (Kolkata), Dilip Singh Kshatriya (Ahmedabad), Vineet Upadhyay (Dehradun)*

## CASES AND ADMISSIONS IN STATES




**1. DELHI**
JAN 1: ● 6,360 ● 420 (6.6%)
JAN 7: ● 39,873 ● 1920 (4.81%)

**2. PUNJAB**
DEC 30: ● 582 ● 36 (6.18%)
JAN 6: ● 6,687 ● 68 (1.01%)

**3. HARYANA**
DEC 30: ● 1,047 ● 684 (65.32%)
JAN 6: ● 7,912 ● 5,834 (73.73%)

**4. BIHAR**
DEC 29: ● 132 ● 63 (47.72%)
JAN 6: ● 6,076 ● 116 (1.9%)

**5. MAHARASHTRA**
DEC 25: ● 1,22,906 ● 905
JAN 6: ● 5,85,758 ● 1,368

**6. UTTAR PRADESH**
DEC 29: ● 473 ● 2 (0.42%)
JAN 6: ● 8,224 ● 125 (1.51%)

**7. MADHYA PRADESH**
DEC 29: **NEW CASES 1,089**
Bed occupancy 1.45%
JAN 5: **NEW CASES 14,022**
Bed occupancy 3.83%

**8. WEST BENGAL**
DEC 30: **NEW CASES: 2,128**
Bed occupancy 1.57%
Jan 6: **NEW CASES: 15,421**
Bed occupancy 4.07%

**9. GUJARAT**
DEC 29: ● 1,902 ● 348 (18.29%)
JAN 6: ● 4,213 ● 651 (15.45%)

**10. CHHATTISGARH**
DEC 29: Bed occupancy **0.36%**
JAN 6: Bed occupancy **0.87%**

**11. UTTARAKHAND**
AS ON JAN 6
**Ventilators 945**: Occupied 43
**Oxygen beds 6,982:** Occupied 128
**ICU beds 1,444:** Occupied 61
**Normal beds 5,883:** Occupied 20

Source: Government hospitals and Covid care centres

**12. RAJASTHAN**

| DATE | Active cases | Occupancy in isolation ward | On Oxygen | On ICU beds | On Ventilators | In Home Isolation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DEC 29 | 537 | 161 | 141 | 27 | 24 | 132 |
| 6 JAN | 3,183 | 35 | 35 | 7 | 19 | 3,085 |

DEC 29: **65.73%** of active cases in hospital
JAN 6: **2.37%** of active cases in hospital

## Party offices shut down

Patna: Offices of Bihar's main political parties including RJD, JD-U, BJP and Congress have been shut after office-bearers and staff tested positive for Covid-19. Main gates of these offices have been locked and workers advised not to visit until the situation turns normal. Bihar has also decided to not hold 'Dahi-Chura Bhoj' — a feast to commemorate Makar Sankranti — in view of the rising number of cases. The surge cases has prompted leaders of the ruling and opposition parties to not to host it. At least eight ministers of the NDA government are positive.

## Non-essential surgeries off

Kolkata: West Bengal's health department has issued an order asking authorities of state-run hospitals in Kolkata and adjoining areas to defer all non-emergency surgeries after hundreds of doctors and nurses tested positive for Covid-19. At present, 165 doctors, 51 nurses and more than 100 health workers of Kolkata Medical College and Hospital are down with the disease. In National Medical College and Hospital, more than 200 doctors and nurses are presently either under treatment or in home isolation after testing positive for the virus.

## Maha orders movement bar

Mumbai: Tightening restrictions in the face of surging Covid-19 cases, the Maharashtra government has prohibited movement in public in groups of five or more from 5 am to 11 pm, effective January 10 midnight. This is except for essential services. Schools and colleges will be closed till February 15 except for activities required to be undertaken for Class X and XII students and administrative activities of teachers. No visitors will be allowed in government offices except with written permission of office heads.

# Restructuring of vaccines against Omicron pondered

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

AN expert panel on Covid vaccines under the National Technical Advisory on Immunization is discussing the possibility of "restructuring and redesigning" of existing vaccines to make them more potent against the Omicron variant.

The move assumes significance as current vaccines are largely ineffective against preventing infection from Omicron, even though there is some evidence that hospitalisations or deaths may be lower during the ongoing wave, due to vaccinations.

N K Arora, head of Covid Working Group of the NTAGI, told this daily deliberations are on whether the existing vaccines in India can be specifically tailored against Omicron.

"Though our national Covid vaccination drive is getting expanded to provide precaution doses to the most vulnerable population groups, our interest at this point is also to push scientists and companies to redesign the vaccines so that they are better suited against Omicron and reduce transmission rates between vaccinated individuals," he said.

He, however, did not specify which are the vaccines that can undergo the rapid restructuring required to target the variant that has triggered a massive wave in the country.

Sources in NTAGI said Covaxin, for instance, which is made of the original whole inactivated SARS CoV 2 virus, can quickly be subjected to such an experiment. "Like in some other countries, we too want to assess if the vaccines are changed intrinsically to be more efficient against preventing infection and disease due to Omicron," said the source.

Many international vaccine makers such as Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna have conceded that even three doses of may not be able to curb the rapid spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant. In India, there are no results available yet on the effect and efficacy of Covishield and Covaxin — the two vaccines largely used so far — in the context of Omicron.

**Other brands also under consideration**

Sources said there are considerations about how can other vaccines such as Corbebax, Novavax and ZyCoVD, can be better utilised to manage Omicron, which is spreading like wildfire

**MELA HOBE (FAIR IS ON)**

Testing at a transit point in Kolkata for pilgrims headed for Gangasagar Mela. The West Bengal government has decided to go ahead amid rising concerns | PTI

**COVID TRACKER**

| 64 | 3,071 | 4,72,169 | 1,00,806 |
|---|---|---|---|
| New Omicron cases | Total Omicron cases | Total active cases | Rise in active cases |

1,203 OMICRON PATIENTS RECOVERED/MIGRATED

| 97.30% | 0.27% | 9.28% | 1.54% | 1.37% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Recovery rate | Fall in recovery rate | Daily positivity rate | Rise in daily positivity rate | Case fatality rate |

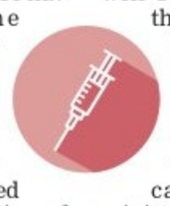
# Slot booking opens on CoWIN for booster shots

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

CoWIN portal, the online platform driving India's vaccination programme against Covid-19, on Saturday opened for booking slots for booster jabs. The campaign will expand on Monday to allow healthcare, frontline workers and those above 60 years to opt for a third shot against coronavirus.

The government, however, said that on-site vaccinations will also be allowed even though no new registration will be required for any beneficiary eligible for the shots.

Health ministry officials said that on CoWIN, only those having completed nine months since the second dose of the vaccine will be able to book slots. Likewise, only those with the mandated gap since the full Covid vaccination will be permitted for on-site administration of the precaution dose.



It has now been decided that homologous vaccines will be administered as the precaution dose, which means those who have taken Covishield earlier will be given the same and those having received two doses of Covaxin will also get only Covaxin as booster dose. The government estimates nearly six crore people will qualify for the precaution doses being administered in view of the threat posed by the Omicron variant of the SARS CoV virus.

Earlier, in a letter to the states, health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said private hospitals that function as vaccination centers will have the option of offering the third vaccine dose for free to their own staffers or at the stipulated cost.

He also wrote that the administration of precaution dose to healthcare and frontline workers of armed forces, special forces under the ministry of home affairs and the Cabinet secretariat may also be facilitated as was done during their first two doses.

EXPRESS READ

## Outsiders involved in communal call: Police

Raipur: Chhattisgarh police claimed to have accessed vital clues about the involvement of outsiders in inciting people, giving a communal twist to a scuffle between two villages. "The probe has reached the concluding stage," said the police chief.

## JD-U not to accept RJD offer: Singh

Patna: Janata Dal-United, an ally of the ruling NDA alliance in Bihar, on Saturday put to rest the controversy over an offer from main opposition RJD to support the ruling party if it snapped ties with BJP, saying the NDA is united in the state.

# BJP pips AAP to bag Chandigarh mayor's post

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chandigarh

SARABJIT Kaur Dhillon of the Bharatiya Janata Party was on Saturday elected as the new mayor of Chandigarh after she defeated Anju Katyal of the Aam Aadmi Party by one vote, triggering a row and accusations of foul play.

Both Kaur and Katyal got 14 votes each but later one vote in the AAP candidate's favour was declared invalid, paving the way for Kaur's victory. Kaur is the wife of Jagtar Singh Dhillon, a former corporation councilor. She entered politics after her husband's ward was reserved for a woman candidate. Soon after the results were declared, AAP councilors created a ruckus as they alleged that the BJP candidate had been favoured in the vote counting process.

The AAP councilors tried to stop the new mayor from addressing the house and marshals had to be called in to restore order.

In the recent Chandigarh municipal corporation elections, the AAP emerged as the single largest party bagging 14 seats in a house of 36.

The BJP came second with 12 seats, the Congress third with eight and the Shiromnai Akali Dal got only one seat.

But a few days after the elections, Congress councilor Harpreet Kaur Babla joined the BJP along with her husband, pushing up the BJP's number to 13. In the mayoral polls on Saturday, Chandigarh member of parliament of the BJP, Kirron Kher, who has ex-officio vote, cast her vote for the saffron party, making the election a tie with 14 votes each in the AAP and BJP's favour. The Congress and Akali Dal councilors abstained from voting. With one AAP vote being declared invalid, Kaur became the new mayor.

The AAP's Jarnail Singh accused the BJP of "murdering democracy". He said in the corporation elections, the residents of the city had wanted his party's candidate to be the mayor. He said the AAP's victory in the mayor's election was certain but the BJP deliberately cancelled one vote.

He claimed there was a clandestine understanding between BJP and Congress to defeat AAP in the mayoral elections.

After winning only 12 seats in the elections, the BJP inducted a councilor from the Congress. He also accused Chandigarh administration officials of helping the BJP. He demanded that the votes be recounted and the mayor re-elected failing which his party would take legal action.

# Religion-centric laws defy idea of unity: Centre to HC

**Rooting for Uniform Civil Code**

The petitions have claimed that the UCC, with a common set of rules governing every citizen, will replace personal laws based on scriptures and customs of religious communities

PTI @ New Delhi

THE Central government has told Delhi High Court that citizens from different religions and denominations following different property and matrimonial laws is an affront to the nation's unity and the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) will result in the integration of India.

The Centre, in an affidavit filed in response to a plea seeking the UCC, said it would examine in consultation with stakeholders the issue of formulating the Code after it receives the report of the Law Commission. The government added that the issue is important and involved sensitivity which required in-depth study of various personal laws governing different communities of the country.

"As and when the Law Commission report is received, the government would examine it with the stakeholders involved in this," the affidavit said.

## Golf competition not to tee off as scheduled

The Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) kick-started the Tata Steel PGTI qualifying School 2022 at a course outside Ahmedabad. However, due to rising Covid cases, the official body of professional golf in India decided to postpone a major part of the event, which was expected to be 'the biggest gathering of golfers in the country.' The body in an emergency meeting on Thursday decided to hold only the pre-qualifying first stage till January 8 at a premier golf club here and postponed all other stages scheduled between January 10 and 20. A total of 338 golfers from India, Canada, Australia, Sri Lanka, USA, UK, UAE, and Nepal were expected to participate.

DILIP SINGH KSHATRIYA
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**AHMEDABAD DIARY**

## Vadodara-based trust loses FCRA registration

Vadodara-based AFMI Charitable Trust, whose managing trustee has been named in a charge sheet by the Vadodara city police for allegedly siphoning off foreign funds received by the NGO for "illegal Islamic activities" has lost its Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) revoked the FCRA registration of the philanthropic organisation last December following a report sent by the Vadodara police. It was the only organisation from the state to lose the registration last year. Meanwhile, the police have begun process of issuing red corner notices to Abdullah Fefdawala and Mustafa Thanawala, the two alleged benefactors of the trust, who allegedly sent hawala funds to the managing trustee Salahuddin Sheikh.

## Fitness trainer Femina Mrs Stylista India 2022

Farzana Kharadi has brought laurels to the diamond city of Surat by winning the Femina Mrs Stylista India 2022 title. Farzana, a fitness trainer, fashion designer, dancer, and black belt in Japanese sword art of Kenjutsu, stole the show by winning the maximum sub-contest rounds. Out of the eight finalists, Kharadi won the titles of Regal Stylista, Inspirational Stylista, Vivacious Stylista, and Congenial Stylista. Out of hundreds of entries from all across the country, a few deserving ladies were shortlisted. Meetali Dhoot walked away with the first runner-up's prize, while Shubhangi Gole finished as second runner-up in the competition.

## Police at your door if not taken second dose

The Ahmedabad municipal corporation has given the police a list of six lakh people, who are yet to receive the second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine. According to a civic body official, "Many are not willingly getting the second dose. So the civic body have roped in the police to help. They will find the roughly six lakh people who are overdue for their second dose and call them to complete the vaccination." The ploice are not happy. According to a source, "The police force is already spread thin. A large contingent of police personnel has been deployed for checkings and night curfew. Now, this will add further pressure on an already overworked police force."

16
people killed when a microbus collided with a public transportation bus in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula

GLOBAL WEATHER
LR: Light Rain • HR: Heavy Rain • LS: Light Snow • TDS: Thundershower • LC: Light Cloud • SNY: Sunny

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Beijing | 4 | -4 | LC | Los Angeles | 22 | 9 | LC |
| Colombo | 31 | 23 | TDS | Melbourne | 23 | 15 | LC |
| Dhaka | 28 | 17 | SNY | Moscow | -5 | -8 | LC |
| Dubai | 24 | 15 | LC | New York | 5 | -3 | LR |
| Houston | 23 | 8 | TDS | Singapore | 31 | 25 | TDS |
| Istanbul | 15 | 9 | LC | Toronto | 4 | -8 | LS |
| London | 7 | 3 | LC | Washington | 7 | -3 | LR |

# FORMER ANTI-TERROR CHIEF HELD OVER KAZAKHSTAN PROTESTS

MOSCOW

THE former head of Kazakhstan's counterintelligence and anti-terror agency has been arrested on charges of attempted government overthrow in the wake of violent protests that the president has blamed on foreign-backed terrorists.

The arrest of Karim Masimov was announced on Saturday by the National Security Committee, which Masimov headed until he was removed this week by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

Authorities said security forces killed 26 demonstrators in this week's unrest and that 18 law-enforcement officers died. More than 4,400 people have been arrested, the Interior Ministry said on Saturday.

The protests in the Central Asian nation were the most widespread since Kazakhstan's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

The unrest began in the country's far west as protests against a sharp rise in prices for liquefied petroleum gas that is widely used as vehicle fuel. The protests spread to the country's largest city, Almaty, where demonstrators seized and burned government buildings.

At Tokayev's request, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, a Russia-led military alliance of six former Soviet states, authorised sending about 2,500 mostly Russian troops to Kazakhstan as peacekeepers.

Some of the force is guarding government facilities in the capital, Nur-Sultan, which "made it possible to release part of the forces of Kazakhstani law enforcement agencies and redeploy them to Almaty to participate in the counter-terrorist operation", according to a statement from Tokayev's office. Tokayev said on Friday that he had authorised security forces to shoot to kill those participating in unrest.

On Saturday, there were no immediate reports of trouble in Almaty. Police dispersed a demonstration and detained people in the city of Aktau, while sporadic gunfire was heard in Kyzylorda, Russian news agency Sputnik said.

No details were given about what Masimov, the former security agency head, was alleged to have done that would constitute an attempted government overthrow.

The National Security Committee, a successor to the Soviet-era KGB, is responsible for counterintelligence, the border guards service and anti-terror activities.

Although the protests began as denunciations of the near-doubling of LPG prices at the start of the year, their spread and intense violence indicate they reflected widespread dissatisfaction in the former Soviet republic run by the same party for more than 30 years.

Many demonstrators shouted "Old man out", a reference to Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was president from Kazakhstan's independence until he resigned in 2019 and anointed Tokayev as his successor. *AP*

(Left) A destroyed bank in central Almaty in Kazakhstan after the violence that erupted following protests over hike in fuel prices. (Top) Soldiers patrol a street in Almaty | AFP & PTI

### Putin, Tokayev discuss steps to 'restore order'

Moscow: Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Kazakh counterpart Kassym-Jomart Tokayev held a "lengthy" phone conversation to discuss the situation in Kazakhstan following unprecedented unrest, the Kremlin said on Saturday. It said that Tokayev informed Putin "in detail" about the situation in the country, "noting that it is developing towards stabilisation," the Kremlin said in a statement. Tokayev also thanked the Collective Security Treaty Organisation military alliance and "especially" Russia for its help in quelling protests that broke out earlier this week. "The presidents exchanged views on the measures taken to restore order in Kazakhstan," the Kremlin said. AFP

# 22 freeze to death in vehicles after heavy snowfall hits Pak hill station

10 children among victims; thousands of tourists trapped in enormous traffic jam in Murree

LAHORE

PAKISTAN'S popular hill station Murree was declared a calamity-hit area on Saturday after at least 22 people, including 10 children, froze to death in their stranded vehicles due to unprecedented snowfall and rush of tourists to the picturesque town in Punjab province.

All the routes in Murree in Rawalpindi district were blocked after thousands of vehicles entered the city, leaving the tourists helpless on the roads. Around 1,000 cars were stuck in the hill station while Punjab chief minister Usman Buzdar issued instructions for expediting rescue work and providing aid to the stranded tourists, the *Dawn* newspaper reported.

The Punjab government has imposed a state of emergency in hospitals, police stations and administration offices.

According to a list issued by Rescue 1122, at least 22 people died, including 10 children, it said. Prime Minister Imran Khan said he was shocked and upset at the tragic deaths of tourists on the road to Murree. "Unprecedented snowfall & rush of people proceeding without checking weather conditions caught district admin unprepared. Have ordered inquiry & putting in place strong regulation to ensure prevention of such tragedies," Khan said in a tweet.

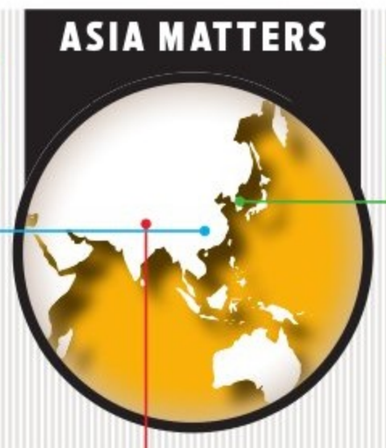
The military has been mobilised to clear roads and rescue people still trapped, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid said in a video message. Rashid said the government was forced to close the road from Islamabad to Murree. The commissioners of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, deputy commissioners, police, are carrying out rescue operations, he said. "As many as 1,000 vehicles have been stuck since night ... some have been evacuated. The locals provided food and blankets to the stranded people," Rashid said.

He said the roads would remain closed to Murree till Sunday at 9pm. "We have also decided to ban tourists who are planning to visit Murree. This is not the time to come to Murree," the minister was quoted as saying by the Geo News.

The Punjab government has declared Murree as a calamity-hit area after heavy snowfall wreaked havoc in the city. Taking notice of the chaos and emergency situation, Punjab Chief Minister Buzdar has directed to open the government's offices and rest houses for the stranded tourists. *PTI*

Soldiers take part in a rescue operation to clear a road covered with snow in Murree in Pakistan on Saturday | AFP

## ASIA MATTERS



CHINA

### Probe ordered into canteen building blast

Beijing: China on Saturday ordered an investigation into the blast in a canteen building in Wulong District on Friday, which killed 16 people and injured 10 others as they were having lunch. The explosion which occurred on Friday noon was suspected to have been triggered by a gas leakage leading to the building's collapse, trapping 26 people inside the Sub-District Office in southwest China's Chongqing Municipality, state-run Xinhua News Agency reported. Sixteen people were killed and 10 injured, one critically, the report said. By midnight on Friday, all the trapped were pulled out of the debris. According to witnesses, people were having lunch in the canteen when the blast took place. The Work Safety Committee of China's Central Cabine will supervise the probe into the building collapse. PTI

NEPAL

### PM Deuba in isolation after Prachanda tests Covid +ve

Kathmandu: Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba went into isolation on Saturday after he was found to be in the close contacts of ruling coalition leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal who tested Covid positive on Friday. Deuba, 75, will undergo his coronavirus test on Sunday, Under Secretary at Prime Minister's Secretariat Janak Raj Bhatta told reporters here. 'Prachanda' and Deuba were in close proximity during a high-level coalition meeting held at the Prime Minister's official residence at Baluwatar on Thursday. Before going into isolation, Deuba had an hour-long meeting with Opposition Leader K P Sharma Oli on Saturday. PTI

SOUTH KOREA

### North's claim of missile test disputed

Seoul: South Korea dismissed North Korea's claim to have recently launched a hypersonic missile as an exaggeration, saying it was a normal ballistic missile that could be intercepted. The assessment is certain to anger North Korea. South Korea has previously avoided publicly disputing North Korea's weapons tests, apparently so as not to aggravate relations. South Korea's Defence Ministry said it believes North Korea hasn't acquired the technologies needed to launch a hypersonic weapon. It said in a report that what North Korea fired on Wednesday was a type of ballistic missile that was displayed in October during a weapons exhibition in Pyongyang, its capital. It said South Korean and US forces could shoot it down. AP

# Cambodia says leader's trip to Myanmar 'good'

PHNOM PENH

CAMBODIA'S leader returned home on Saturday from the first visit by a head of state to Myanmar since the military coup last year plunged it into turmoil, with his foreign minister declaring the mission a success though there was little evidence of a breakthrough.

Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn told reporters that talks between Prime Minister Hun Sen and Myanmar's leader achieved "a very good, positive result with a progressive step forward" on the implementation of peace efforts agreed to by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, a regional bloc currently led by Cambodia.

Hun Sen's meeting with Myanmar's military chief, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, who overthrew the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi last February, triggered protests in Myanmar and criticism abroad. Opponents said it legitimised the military takeover and broke the generals' near-total diplomatic isolation.

The military's seizure of power has led to widespread conflict with civilians forming guerrilla groups and thousands of people driven from their homes by army offensives.

"If there is anyone who opposes progressing these negotiations and the agreements like this, it is only those people who love war, those people who do not want to see Myanmar return to stability and peace," said Prak Sokhonn, who is also ASEAN's special envoy to Myanmar.

Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen (left) with Myanmar military chief Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw | AFP

Friday's joint statement on the talks, which described them as "frank and candid", said Min Aung Hlaing was extending a cease-fire until the end of the year, and that both leaders would push for a meeting of stakeholders on delivering humanitarian aid.

The cease-fire offer is unlikely to be taken seriously by the military's opponents. Such arrangements are routinely broken in Myanmar. The cease-fire also specifically referred only to long-standing ethic armed groups, not the new civilian guerrilla units that are currently doing most of the fighting. Prak Sokhonn also disclosed that Hun Sen brought up the case of Australian Sean Turnell, a former economic advisor to Suu Kyi who is on trial in Myanmar on charges of violating state secrets. *AP*

EXPRESS READ

### Nine bodies found on road in Mexican state

Veracruz: Nine bodies were found on a road in eastern Mexico, officials said — the latest gruesome discovery in a country plagued by drug cartel-related violence. The corpses were left on a highway in the municipality of Isla in the state of Veracruz, state governor Cuitlahuac Garcia said. The region, which borders the Gulf of Mexico, is a flashpoint in turf wars between rival drug gangs, and one of the country's most violent states.Garcia said reinforcements were being sent to the area to hunt for those responsible, vowing "no impunity." *AFP*

### Protest against steps targeting unvaccinated

Beirut: Hundreds of people rallied in Beirut on Saturday to protest against the measures imposed against the unvaccinated, saying individuals should have the right to decide whether to be inoculated or not. Vaccination is not compulsory in Lebanon, but in recent days, authorities have cracked down on people who are not inoculated or don't carry a negative PCR test. The protest came days after authorities imposed fresh restrictions, including the requirement of a vaccination certificate or negative PCR test for entry into restaurants, hotels and similar venues. *AP*

# Woman locks up Covid +ve son in car boot

HOUSTON

A SCHOOL teacher in the US state of Texas faces arrest and a child endangerment charge after she was found to have locked up her 13-year-old Covid-positive son in the trunk of her car in fear of contracting the disease, according to media reports on Saturday.

On January 3, Sarah Beam, 41, was enquiring about getting her child tested for Covid-19 at a screening drive-thru in Harris County, when she told an official that her son was locked in her car boot, the Houston Chronicle newspaper reported.

The official told Beam that her son would need to be removed from the trunk before he was tested for Covid.Beam refused and left the premises, following which Gordon alerted the local police. An arrest warrant has been issued against her by the Harris County District Court. *AP*

# UN to hold Sudan talks to end post-coup crisis

KHARTOUM

THE United Nations said on Saturday it willlaunch talks to help Sudan find an end to the crisis following a military coup that stalled the transition to civilian rule.

"It is time to end the violence and enter into a constructive process," UN special envoy Volker Perthes said in a statement, announcing talks to bring together "all key civilian and military stakeholders".

Sudan has been shaken by pro-democracy protests and a deadly crackdown by security forces since General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan launched the October 25 military takeover, that dismantled a fragile power-sharing agreement between the military and civilians. The arrangement was set up following the April 2019 ouster of autocratic president Omar al-Bashir, also after months of street protest against his iron-fisted rule. At least 60 people have been killed since the coup in weeks of protests, according to the Central Committee of Sudan Doctors, which is part of the pro-democracy movement.

"The (democratic) transition has faced major setbacks that have deeply impacted the country since the military coup," Perthes said.

"The subsequent and repeated violence against largely peaceful demonstrators has only served to deepen the mistrust among all political parties in Sudan," he added.

The UN-facilitated talks are aimed at "supporting Sudanese stakeholders in agreeing on a way out of the current political crisis and... a sustainable path forward towards democracy and peace," Perthes said. It was not immediately clear when the talks would begin. *AFP*

BURNING SINCE 1971

# *Turkmenistan plans to close its 'Gateway to Hell'*

ASHGABAT

TURKMENISTAN'S strongman leader has ordered experts to find a way to finally extinguish a massive five-decade old fire in a giant natural gas crater in the Central Asian country, dubbed the "Gateway to Hell".

Citing environmental and economic concerns, President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov appeared on state television on Saturday telling officials to put out the flames at the Darvaza gas crater in the middle of the vast Karakum desert.

In 2010, Berdymukhamedov had ordered experts to find a way to put out the flames that have been burning ever since a Soviet drilling operation went awry in 1971.

President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov said the man-made crater "negatively affects both the environment and the health of the people living nearby".

"We are losing valuable natural resources for which we could get significant profits and use them for improving the well-being of our people," he said in televised remarks.

Berdymukhamedov instructed officials to "find a solution to extinguish the fire". The crater was created in 1971 during a Soviet drilling accident that hit a gas cavern, causing the drilling rig to fall in and the earth to collapse underneath it.

To prevent the dangerous fumes from spreading, the Soviets decided to burn off the gas by setting it on fire.

The pit has been ablaze ever since and previous attempts to put it out have been unsuccessful.

The resulting crater — 70 metres (229 feet) wide and 20 metres (65 feet) deep — is a popular tourist attraction in the ex-Soviet country. *AFP*

'The Gateway to Hell', a huge burning gas crater in the heart of Turkmenistan's Karakum desert | AFP (FILE PIC)

**$633.614 bn** India's total foreign exchange reserves, after declining by $1.466 billion in the week ended December 31, according to RBI data

# A tool that allows access to your everyday income

## Fintech product enables employees to see, withdraw earned money

SAMIKSHA GOEL @ New Delhi

IF one could accrue one's earned pay on a daily basis, would it ease his/her financial pressures? Around 38% people in a survey responded in affirmative to what may seem like a hypothetical question but is not.

A bank-like setting, where you can see and withdraw the money that you have earned, or as it is called, Earned Wage Access, is a fintech product enabling employees to access a portion of their accrued but unpaid salary any time before payday.

Employees, according to a Refyne survey, seem thrilled about the new concept. While 77% of respondents feel positive about this concept and are ready to evaluate its usage, 28% said they would use a EWA product. Notably, 59% of respondents would consider EWA as a deciding factor for their next job.

The report further discovered that the highest interest for EWA exists among the millennial professionals. Employees feel that EWA will help them with more liquidity to manage unexpected expenses, investment planning and improve their financial wellbeing.

**NEW PAY CHEQUE**

**Earned Wage Access** (EWA) is a fintech product which enables employees to access a portion of their accrued but unpaid **salary any time** before payday

Millennial professionals show the **maximum interest** in EWA

Employees feel it will help them with more liquidity to manage unexpected expenses, investment planning and **improve their financial wellbeing**

Employers are concerned that the **flexibility to access wages** any day of the month will demand a lot in terms of administrative work

### But what about employers?

Refyne, which claims to be India's first and largest EWA platform, established in 2020, has onboarded 120 clients in the last one year.

Chitresh Sharma, CEO and Co-Founder, Refyne, says the start-up is witnessing steady traction with month on month growth with new clients as well as increasing adoption among existing partners' staff as employers can clearly observe advantages for their employees (both full-time and contracted) with Refyne's Earned Wage Access solution.

"For employers, Refyne is a free, zero-risk product that seamlessly integrates with any HRMS and payroll software. Refyne fronts the capital for the earned salary withdrawals, meaning employers' working capital remains untouched and allows them to maximise their cash flow. EWA also helps save man hours for HR managers spent in processing salary advances and the associated paperwork," said Sharma, noting that Refyne does not have any direct competitors in the country, and its indirect competitors include payday lenders, loan apps, loan sharks, and other informal and unregulated credit scheme providers.

Akbar Khan, who is the CEO of a EWA start-up Rain India, says his company is working with the leading enterprise clients across manufacturing, IT, staffing, healthcare, hospitality and other sectors in India.

He says there are only a handful of EWA companies operating in India. "EWA is a relatively new concept for the Indian market which is clearly differentiated from the personal/consumer loan, salary advance and payday loans."

Before Rain launched its business in India earlier this year, they also undertook an in-depth primary research exercise of the salaried employee cohort.

"Some of the interesting insights coming out of the research demonstrated a strong product market fit for EWA and the need for a credible global financial wellness provider with deep local expertise. For example, 90% of those surveyed received their salaries once, at the end of the month, while 20% ran out of funds in the first 10 days of the month, 40% by the middle of the month and 85% by the end of the month,"

Sumeet Doshi, Country Manager, UKG India, a company that has recently partnered with Rain, says providing access to their own earned wages is key to ensuring that employees feel valued and supported and are able to take charge of their own financial wellness.

"Our partnership with Rain India ensures that we continue to fulfil our commitment to ensure meaningful and impactful solutions to our customers here in India."

### HR concerns

While employees seem intrigued, HR leaders are concerned about the EWA solution fitting into the lifestyle or culture of the Indian workforce.

"The reason being, the flexibility to access wages any day of the month, will demand a lot in terms of administrative work. Another big challenge that HR heads foresee is that of absconding workers. In the western professional culture, the longevity factor is quite high. Employees stick around with their companies for a long time. In India, on the other hand, there are many industries where the attrition is very high," says Vicky Jain, Founder of HR tech start-up uKnowva, explaining, such a change will need a major transformation in the culture of the organisation as a whole.

Also, from a technical perspective, the existing payroll infrastructure may not be set up to handle regular demands from employees to be paid, Jain said.

"While there's no doubt that EWA is a game-changing approach to improve payroll, a fantastic opportunity to be progressive and forward-thinking, and a flexible way to support employees' changing work habits and lifestyle in the post-pandemic era but implementing the same in the Indian work culture wouldn't be an easy task. The concept is still new and only time will tell whether it'll gain traction in the Indian work culture," he added.

GURBIR SINGH

NEWSCOPE

# ELIMINATING CHARITIES & NGOs AS PART OF THE HINDUTVA AGENDA

IT was not a good start to 2022 for hundreds of non-government organisations (NGOs) and the wide network of local communities who rely on them. In one fell swoop, the Union government cancelled the foreign contribution licenses of nearly 6,000 NGOs. Many of these had not reapplied for the licence under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976.

However, as many as 179 organisations were specifically denied licences for reasons that are still shrouded in mystery. Some of them that faced short shrift are big and respected organisations like the Missionaries of Charity, founded by Mother Teresa, and Oxfam India. Other well know community NGOs include the Hamdard Education Society and educational trusts like India Habitat Centre, Lady Sriram College for Women and the DAV College Trust.

The move against the Missionaries of Charity has shocked the world. Though a Catholic order, Mother St Theresa had risen above both politics and religion. From a small band who started work in 1950 to bring succor to the lepers of Kolkata, she grew her network to 5,000 nuns in over a 100 countries working for those who had no future. She received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 and was canonized as a Saint by Pope Francis in 2016, posthumously.

There has been a systematic crackdown on NGOs since the NDA government took power in 2014. In the first round up to 2019, the government suspended the FCRA licences of around 14,500 NGOs. These included Greenpeace, Action Aid and Amnesty International - international networks the government felt were critical of government policies. Then followed a second guillotine a few months ago, around September of last year. From a peak of over 40,000 NGOs registered to receive foreign funds, the number has now whittled down to 16,829.

### Two-way clampdown

The systematic choking of NGOs has to be seen as a Hindutva programme with a two-fold strategy. The first pincer is against those NGOs seen as arms of Muslims, Christian and other minority religious groups. These are seen as proselytising movements who seek to convert Hindus through the 'ruse' of food aid and education.

Despite the good work of the Missionaries of Charity, the BJP government has always looked upon the charity with suspicion. For instance, an investigation has been launched into the nuns allegedly forcing conversions at some of its homes for children in Gujarat. Police complaints have also been filed against the group for teaching the Bible to children.

It is no coincidence that many of these NGOs have come under the attack of extremist Hindu groups like the Bajrang Dal. On Christmas Day there were 9 attacks on churches and other community gatherings while in the first 9 months of calendar 2021, as many as 300 such attacks have been documented against Christian communities.

It is an interesting jugalbandi. The illegal pogroms are carried out by right wing, fringe groups, with supposedly no hand of the state; on the other hand, the sources of funding and support are slowly cut off by state fiat, and the community groups are slowly but systematically choked.

The other drive is against those NGOs perceived to be critical of government and its policies. Oxfam International, a network of 21 charities that provides food aid, disaster relief and health support to poor communities, also challenges the inequality written into the Capitalist World Order.

For instance, a year ago it brought out 'India's Unequal Healthcare Story' where Oxfam argued that growing socio-economic inequalities in India are disproportionately affecting health outcomes of marginalised groups due to the absence of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

### Yeoman service

These kind of views are unpalatable. The unsaid government view is NGOs should restrict themselves to social service, and not meddle in politics. The ouster of Amnesty International from India followed the same trajectory: the organisation's highlighting of issues such as the plight of political prisoners, and communal violence against the minority communities, was found to be damaging India's international standing.

The ouster of many like Oxfam will be a real loss to vulnerable communities who have scant access to state support. During the two waves of the pandemic, NGOs formed the core of the voluntary support providing food and medicines to those at the bottom of the ladder. Oxfam India, for instance, provided 6 oxygen generating plants and distributed over 13,388 life-saving medical equipment such as oxygen cylinders, BiPAP Machines, concentrators, and 20,000 testing kits in 16 states.

Besides, NGOs over the years have become the eyes and ears of civil society highlighting shortcomings ignored by political parties and the local administration. Providing a voice to the local community only adds to the democratisation of society, and taking away this voice will make our polity poorer.

**EXPRESS READ**

### DMart Q3 net rises 23.6% to ₹552.53 cr

New Delhi: Avenue Supermarts, which owns and operates retail chain DMart, on Saturday reported a 23.62% rise in consolidated net profit to ₹552.53 crore for the third quarter ended Dec 31. The company had posted a net profit of ₹446.95 crore in the same quarter a year ago, Avenue Supermarts said in a BSE filing. Its revenue from operations was up 22.22% at ₹9,217.76 cr during Q3 against ₹7,542 cr in the corresponding quarter last fiscal.

### CSB Bank MD & CEO takes early retirement

New Delhi: CSB Bank on Saturday said its managing director and chief executive C VR Rajendran has decided for an early retirement on health grounds, and the lender will set up a committee to find a successor. This is to inform you that the bank's board in its meeting held on Jan 8, 2022, considered and accepted the request of C VR Rajendran to take an early retirement from the position, to take care of his health under the advice of his physicians, CSB Bank said.

### Equitas Holdings to divest stake in ETPL

New Delhi: Equitas Holdings Ltd will divest its entire stake in subsidiary Equitas Technologies (ETPL) as part of the requirement for the merger with Equitas Small Finance Bank (ESFB). As part of the RBI's conditions, being the promoter of ESFB, the boards of Equitas Holdings and ESFB had in July 2021 approved the amalgamation between them. After that all the assets held by Equitas Holdings, including its investments in ETPL, have to be transferred to ESFB.

Satya Nadella, Microsoft CEO

# Microsoft CEO Nadella invests in fintech unicorn Groww

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ Bengaluru

MICROSOFT Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella has invested in investment platform Groww. He will also act as its advisor.

The fintech unicorn's co-founder and CEO Lalit Keshre tweeted the announcement on Saturday saying, "Groww gets one of the world's best CEOs as an investor and advisor. Thrilled to have @satyanadella join us in our mission to make financial services accessible in India."

Established in 2016, founded by four ex-Flipsters Lalit Keshre, Harsh Jain, Neeraj Singh, and Ishan Bansal, Groww in April 2021 entered the unicorn club by raising $83 million funding from Tiger Global. A few months ago, the start-up raised $251 million led by Iconiq Growth and its valuation stands at over $3 billion.

Groww allows individuals to invest and trade in stocks, mutual funds, US stocks, and gold. It also has fixed deposit options for conventional investors. With over 20 million customers and over 500 team members, it is backed by Ribbit Capital, Sequoia, Tiger Global and Propel Venture Partners and Y Combinator.

Recently, the start-up launched Groww Academy, which has course content for all aspects of financial services, catering to beginners as well as advanced.

The fintech unicorn competes with Zerodha, Upstox and Fisdom, among other players.

# Over 5 lakh nights booked for New Year celebrations: OYO

OVER 10 lakh people booked for more than 5 lakh nights with hospitality chain OYO for New Year 2022 celebrations, generating bookings worth around ₹110 crore over the weekend on its global platform, according to company Founder & Group CEO Ritesh Agarwal.

In a social media post, he said 58% bookings for the New Year's eve were made on the same day keeping the trend witnessed since December 2017 that reflected the "impulsive emotion and decision" related with travel.

"Thank you to over a million people who booked more than half a million nights with us this New Years. For all of us at OYO, it was a busy NY (new year)," he wrote in his post on LinkedIn.

He further said, "2021 booking was (the) highest among 90 pandemic weekends since April 2020 with total customer bookings globally on our platform worth (around) ₹110 crore ($14.6 m) over the weekend." Agarwal said rooms booked on NY weekend of Dec 30-31 in 2021 stood at 5.03 lakh against 1.02 lakh 2016. *PTI*

**KARNATAKA CM LAUNCHES BOB CARD**

Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai launches the Exclusive BOB Card (BoB-ICSI Diamond Card) at the 49th National Convention of Company Secretaries event at Bengaluru Palace. Sudhakara D Nayak A, Zonal Head, Bank of Baroda, Bengaluru Zone and other members and officials from ICSI attended the event.

# Three telcos enough for Indian market; no scope for more: COAI

RAKESH KUMAR @New Delhi

THERE is no scope for new entrants as the Indian telecom market is adequate for three players now, said Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) director general SP Kochhar. Kochar in an interview with TNIE said that Indian telecom has reached its consolidation stage and thus there is no space for other operators.

"Any industry initially begins with one or two players, then it starts expanding and multiple numbers of players come in it. After sometime consolidation starts, and then at the end, we have two or three big players or serious players. We have reached this consolidation stage right now," said Kochhar.

Till last decade the Indian telecom industry was flooded with operators including Airtel, Tata Teleservices, Aircel, Videocon, Reliance Communications, Vodafone, Idea and state-owned BSNL and MTNL. Among them only Airtel, Vodafone and Idea could survive for sometime. However, the entry of Reliance Jio in 2016 disrupted the entire telecom market and started a price war. Reliance Jio compelled its rivals to follow similar strategies– to keep lower tariffs to stay relevant. Subsequently, both Airtel and Vodafone have seen their profits and market shares dwindle. The lower tariff and government taxes led the industry into loss, piled up their debts.

"Telecom is not a lucrative field as it is a highly capital intensive industry. Then there are different types of taxes and tariffs on it. I don't think there is too much scope for others to come. There are no chances of exiting any one from it right now. I think the market will continue with the current set of three players. It is good enough for the Indian market," said Kochhar.

As per telecom regulatory data, Airtel has market shares to 30.35% while Vi has 23.07% and Jio has 36.58% in October. And the recent government aid package and tariff hike by the telecom operators improved their situation.

# Need urban-focused job plan to aid consumption

NILESH SHAH

LAST year's budget provided healing touch to pandemic-hit economy. This year's budget should capitalise on the same for accelerated growth and equitable distribution.

Today the government spending, investments, agriculture and trade are firmly above pre-pandemic levels. Consumption, especially, in certain segments require a healing touch.

**Urban-focused employment scheme:** Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) has done a wonderful job not only in providing jobs but also creating rural infrastructure. An urban-focussed employment guarantee scheme will go a long way in supporting consumption.

**Tax concession for housing:** The tax concessions for housing have remained the same for last many years. Any increase in the same will be a big boost to growth.

**ESG implementation:** The budget should speak about encouragement given by the government for ESG implementation in India. We have broken away from the BRIC peers leaving Brazil Russia and China behind on equity valuations.

Reiterating our commitment towards ESG will go a long way in enhancing our brand and maintaining our premium equity valuation.

**Improving ESG scores of PSUs:** Appointment of independent directors in PSUs will help in reducing PSUs valuation gap with market and better realisation in divestment.

**Boost realisation from asset monetisation:** This budget should look to raise non-tax revenue by monetisation of assets. Mutual fund industries would support national asset monetisation.

**Make financial investment easier:** Our outflow towards gold imports is more than FDI or FPIs received in last two decades. Today buying Gold is much easier than investing in a financial Instrument. I request the government increase the ease of investment by making KYC simpler and through appropriate education.

*—Nilesh Shah is MD of Kotak AMC and part-time member of EAC-PM*

## *Osaka withdraws from Melbourne tournament semis*

Defending Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka withdrew from her semifinal match Saturday at a WTA tournament with an abdominal injury, allowing her opponent Veronika Kudermetova to advance to the final on a walkover. Kudermetova on Sunday will face Simona Halep, who beat Zheng Qinwen 6-3, 6-2 in the other semifinal in the Summer Set 1 event.

# Djokovic had Covid last month: Court documents

Men's World No 1 has been confined to an immigration detention hotel in Melbourne, where he's been preparing for legal challenge against his visa cancellation

**AP** @ Melbourne

NOVAK Djokovic's lawyers filed court papers on Saturday in his challenge against deportation from Australia that show the tennis star tested positive for Covid-19 last month and recovered, grounds he used in applying for a medical exemption to the country's strict vaccination rules.

The No. 1-ranked Djokovic was denied entry at the Melbourne airport late Wednesday after border officials cancelled his visa for failing to meet its entry requirement that all non-citizens be fully vaccinated for Covid-19. Djokovic was given a medical exemption backed by the Victoria state government and Australian Open organizers on January 1, based on information he supplied to two independent medical panels, and he was approved for a visa electronically.

But it has since emerged that the Victoria state medical exemption, allowed for people who tested positive for the coronavirus within the last six months, was deemed invalid by the federal border authorities.

Djokovic has been confined to an immigration detention hotel in Melbourne, where he's been preparing for the legal challenge against his visa cancellation in the Federal Circuit Court on Monday.

The Australian Open starts a week from Monday. Djokovic is the defending champion and has won the Australian Open men's singles title nine times. He has 20 Grand Slam singles title, a men's record he shares with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal.

The *Australian Broadcasting Corp.* and the *Australian Associated Press* reported details of the documents late Saturday, two days before the court hearing.

It showed Djokovic received a letter from Tennis Australia's chief medical officer on December 30 last year "recording that he had been provided with a 'medical exemption from Covid vaccination' on the grounds that he had recently recovered from Covid."

The exemption certification said the date of the 34-year-old Serb's first positive test was December 16, 2021, "and that he had not had a fever or respiratory symptoms in the past 72 hours."

On December 14, Djokovic attended a Euroleague basketball game between Red Star and Barcelona in a packed sports hall in Belgrade. He was photographed hugging several players of both teams, including some who soon later tested positive. The court submission Saturday said Djokovic received confirmation from Australia's Department of Home Affairs saying that his travel declaration had been assessed and that his responses indicated he met the requirements for quarantine-free arrival in Australia.

If he fails to have his visa cancellation overturned and gets deported, Djokovic could be barred from the country for up to three years.

Australian Open organizers have not commented publicly since Wednesday, except to tell Australian newspapers that no players have been misled over the vaccination requirements.

Tournament director Craig Tiley has continued working in the background with Djokovic.

Tiley's video message to Australian Open staff about the tournament's "difficult time in the public arena" was published in *News Corp. newspapers* Saturday.

The 34-year-old Djokovic was one of two players put into detention in a hotel in Melbourne that also houses refugees and asylum seekers. A third person, reported to be an official, left the country voluntarily after border force investigations.

Tennis Australia and the government of Victoria state, where the Australian Open is played, are blaming confusion over the precise definitions regarding grounds for medical exemptions.

### Serb attended events after 'positive test'

Djokovic was at a young players event in Belgrade the following day, without a mask.The Belgrade tennis federation, in Facebook post after the December 17 ceremony, reported Djokovic had handed cups and awards to best young players in 2021.

The event, held at the Novak tennis centre in the Serbian capital, was attended only by the award winners "due to epidemiological measures related to the coronavirus pandemic", said the federation statement.

It was accompanied with several photos of Djokovic, posing with the federation's officials and some 20 young players holding cups and awards.

No one was wearing a mask.

## POINTS TO PONDER BEFORE CAPE TOWN

With the Indian team's stated aim of winning in South Africa on the line, a look at the calls that's facing the management ahead of the third Test at Cape Town from Tuesday...

**KOHLI IN BUT WHO WILL GO OUT?**

Right now, this is the $64mn question. If coach Rahul Dravid's words were anything to go by, Virat Kohli will walk back into the XI after his niggle. But which batter will sit out to accommodate the captain? All three of Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane and Hanuma Vihari made runs. It will be extremely harsh if they ask Vihari to sit out considering he has hardly put a foot wrong in the one chance he got. If they want to turn their attention towards Pujara or Rahane, both have battled indifferent form before their timely fifties in the second innings. But are they in form? Both have had at least two failures in the four innings. This is not going to be an easy decision but, if the past is anything to go by, this team management values experience.

**THE THIRD SEAMER CONUNDRUM**

As long as they are fit, Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah & Shardul Thakur will all pick themselves. The question, then, is who will replace Mohammed Siraj, if he doesn't shake of the hamstring injury he picked up in the first innings. There are two obvious replacements but they don't bring the same skillsets to the table. One is Umesh Yadav & the other is Ishant Sharma. Umesh is a touch quicker, can be used as a wicket-taking option in all phases but is also expensive as he bowls fuller lengths. Ishant can bowl dry but is perhaps not as potent when it comes to picking up wickets. However, what could tilt the scales in his favour is that he can be used as a hit-the-deck bowler.

**APPROACH TO BATTING**

The approach of India's batters have been clear in each of the last three innings. They have been bowled out in under 65 overs on each occasion. While the logic behind that is easy to infer — better to prioritise runs than survival on surfaces helpful for pacers — that doesn't mean looking for boundaries every over. This has happened because the entirety of India's lower middle order including Rishabh Pant, Ravichandran Ashwin and Thakur are natural stroke-makers. With 3, 4 and 5 not in the best of form, there is not a single batter out there capable of batting time. Sample this: the openers, between them, have faced 699 balls. Nos 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 have put together faced 893 across the four innings. This is unsustainable and if the management does not arrest this slide, it will only put more pressure on the openers.

**0** India are yet to win a match at Cape Town **(played 4, drawn 1)**

**7** No of zeroes India have had across the two Tests

# Vaccine issue: Detour for U-19 team members

**VENKATA KRISHNA B** @Chennai

SEVEN members of the India Under-19 team en route Georgetown (Guyana) were forced to spend a night at Port of Spain (Trinidad & Tobago) on January 4 as they were not fully vaccinated. However, the quick intervention of the BCCI and the International Cricket Council meant the seven players were cleared to proceed a day later and have joined the rest of the Indian contingent.

The Indian U-19 cricket team captained by Yash Dhull left for the Caribbean on January 3 from Dubai after the Asia Cup campaign and were supposed to land in Guyana, where they are scheduled to play their first round matches against South Africa, Ireland and Uganda. However, they faced the issue upon landing in Port of Spain.

"There was miscommunication. So once the necessary paperwork was cleared, the seven players were allowed to reach Guyana. As per local guidelines, full vaccination is mandatory. And six of the players had received only one shot while one player wasn't fully vaccinated," a BCCI official told this newspaper.

It is understood that the BCCI had to seek diplomatic help which helped in resolving the issue without further delay. "It was just a routine. Some of them turned 18 only recently, which is the minimum age-limit to get vaccination," the official stated.

# Khawaja hits 2nd ton of Test to put Oz in control

**AFP** @ Sydney

USMAN Khawaja finessed his second century of the match to place Australia in a commanding position to chase down another victory over England in the fourth Ashes Test in Sydney on Saturday. Khawaja has been in imperious form in his comeback from a 30-month Test exile, hitting 137 in the first innings before adding an unbeaten 101 to break English hearts.

His 179-run partnership with youngster Cameron Green set up a late declaration and left a beleaguered England having to defy history with a formidable target of 388.

The tourists got to the close without losing a wicket for 30, with Zak Crawley on 22 not out and Haseeb Hameed on eight. They trail by 357.

# Blasters take on Hyderabad amidst Covid scare in bio-bubble

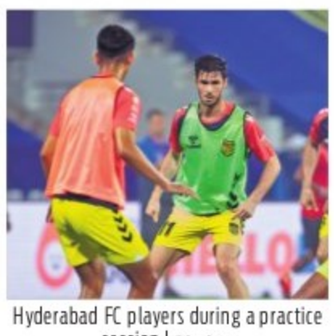
**MARTIN JOSEPH** @Kochi

AMONG other things, one of the major talking points from the Indian Super League in recent days has been the postponement of Saturday's match between Odisha FC and ATK Mohun Bagan after a Covid case was detected in the Kolkata outfit's camp.

At a time when the I-League had to be postponed for six weeks due to a Covid outbreak, it remains to be seen how the ISL organisers manage to contain the virus in the bio-bubble set up in Goa.

As things stand, the league is set to continue and a crucial encounter is set to be held at the Tilak Maidan in Vasco on Sunday when Kerala Blasters take on Hyderabad FC in a match between two in-form teams.

While the Blasters are looking to get back into the top four,



Hyderabad FC players during a practice session | File photo

Hyderabad can displace Mumbai City at the top if they can secure a victory. Prior to the news of the Covid outbreak, the two camps were focussed on the game at hand and Blasters head coach Ivan Vukomanovic once again underlined why any team can beat any team in the ISL. In their previous game, Blasters started as the hot favourites against a struggling FC Goa, only to finish the game at 2-2 and walk away with a point.

In this match, Hyderabad will start as the clear favourites given their recent form and with leading goalscorer Bartholomew Ogbeche being in red-hot form so far. Vukomanic was all praise for the Hyderabad outfit ahead of the game. "Well, we have to praise them because they are working consistently for the second year in a row. They are not top of the table by coincidence, they deserve to be there. They have had a strategy and now it's showing good results. Nothing happens overnight in football. When you work consistently it gives you results. They are doing a great job," said Vukomanovic.

With both teams coming into the game with their own impressive unbeaten streaks and star players, it could turn into an enticing encounter.

**Live on Star Sports Network @ 7.30 pm**

**EXPRESS READ**

### VAR to make debut in India

DELHI: The AFC Women's Asian Cup is set to create history as Video Assistant Referee (VAR) will be used for the first time in India from the quarterfinals stage of the continental competition. The tournament will be played across three venues in Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Pune from January 20. The quarterfinals begin on January 30.

### Bopanna-Ramkumar reach final

ADELAIDE: India's Rohan Bopanna and Ramkumar Ramanathan upstaged fourth seeds Tomislav Brkic and Santiago Gonzalez in straight sets to reach the final of the Adelaide International, here on Saturday. The Indian duo ousted the Bosnian-Mexican duo 6-2, 6-4 in the doubles semifinals. They will now lock horns with top seeds Ivan Dodig of Croatia and Brazilian Marcelo Melo.

### Basketball: Karnataka boys in Junior National semifinal

BENGALURU: Karnataka boys defeated Delhi 77-68 in the quarterfinals of the Junior National Basketball Championship in Indore on Saturday. Manoj BM top-scored with 31 points to help Karnataka reach the semifinals. Meanwhile, Karnataka girls lost to Rajasthan 41-42 in the quarterfinal.

**DOUBLE DELIGHT**

# *Manipur women row to podium finish on nationals debut*

**FIROZ MIRZA** @Chennai

FUNDING from the state association and friends helped them compete in the nationals — both junior and senior championships. Financial constraints, however, could not deter them from finishing on the podium in both the events.

Meet Manipur's women rowers, Th Priya Devi and H Tendenthoi Devi, who bagged 2000m double sculls silver on their debut at the ongoing 39th Senior National Rowing and 23rd Open Sprints Championships in the Army Rowing Node, Pune. Just a month ago, they had clinched gold in the same event in the junior nationals.

Hailing from modest families — Tendenthoi's father H Binoy Singh is a fisherman while Priya's father Th Somen Singh is a farmer, the duo started rowing just a few years ago after they cleared the selection trials organised by the Manipur Rowing Association.

"Sports for children here is one step towards a better future. Like others, Priya and Tendenthoi also started rowing hoping for government jobs so that they can contribute towards families' income," Debit Singh, who coaches around 130 children including the duo at the Loktak Takmu Water Sports Complex in Moirang along with Narengbam Lakshmi Devi, told this daily.

Singh claimed that the complex is in a dilapidated state with children forced to live in shabby structures. "Rowing is an expensive sport. We can produce good rowers but don't have the equipment and financial support. Even to come here (Pune) and participate, we had to borrow money from friends and relatives. The state government reimburses the amount but it takes time."

Priya and Tendenthoi clocked 8:39.6 seconds to finish second behind Avinash Kaur and Kiran, whose timing was 8:28.0 seconds. Deepika Xess and Reshma Kumari Minz secured bronze with a timing of 8:54.8 seconds. The Manipuri duo also competed in the 500m double sculls but missed out on bronze by a few microseconds.

(From L) H Tendenthoi Devi, coach Debit Singh and Th Priya Devi

Both live in separate villages around 2-3km from the centre but decided to stay at the complex to ensure that they can train regularly. "Travelling every day will cost them so that they prefer to stay at the complex. These children could do much better if given the facilities. In just a few years, Priya and Tendenthoi won medals. If given the resources, they can improve significantly and go on to represent the country," signed off the coach.

Meanwhile, the national championships concluded on Saturday with 500m finals of various events in men's and women's categories.

**Gold medallists (500m): Women:** Pair: Sonali Swain & Ritu Kudi; Coxless four: Ashmita Karketta, Jharna Hasti, Deepika Xess & Manjula Xess; Single sculls: Navneet Kaur; Double sculls: Avinash Kaur & Pooja. **Men:** Pair: Punit Kumar & Gurmeet Singh; Double sculls: Dushyant & Sukhmeet Singh; Lightweight double sculls: Arwinder Singh & Sunil Attry; Single sculls: Parminder Singh; Coxless four: Jasveer Singh, Bheem Singh, Nitish Kumar & Ashish; **Para men's single sculls:** K Narayana. **Mixed double sculls:** Shagandeep Singh & Sanjukta Dung.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

This is to bring to the notice of the general public that Our clients **Sri.Suresh Moorthi** S/o. Moorthi Ponnappan **& Smt. Santhi Rajendran** W/o.Rajendran are intending to Purchase the Scheduled Property from **Mrs.K.Reshma Sultana** W/o Sri.Ummer Sharieff, any person/s, Company, Bank, Institutions, Department etc objecting for sale or are having any right, title, interest or any type of claim over the scheduled property is hereby called upon to file their objections/claims what so ever along with documentary proof within **5 days** from the date of publication of this notice with the herein mentioned advocates failing which our client shall proceed and complete the Sale transaction with the above stated person.

**SCHEDULE PROPERTY**

All that piece and parcel of the Property bearing **Site No.211**, Katha No.211, formed out of Sy No.3/2 (Old No.3) of **Anagalpura Village, Bidarahalli Hobli, Bangalore East Taluk, Bangalore** measuring East to West 50 Feet and North to South 40 Feet, in all measuring 2000 Square Feet and bounded on the:- **East by : Site No.210, West by : Road, North by : Site No.212, South by : Road.**

**C.K.V.K. LAW ASSOCIATES**
**Mr. VENKATESH CHANDRAN** M.A., LL.B.
**Advocates & Legal Consultants**
Bangalore-560 043. Contact : 9845846428

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public are hereby informed that Mr. Rajagopal son of Nagesh, representative of Mrs.Tara Muneer had lost the Original registered Sale Deed dated 02.06.1979, registered as document No.947/1979-80, Volume No.2017, at Pages 3-6, of Book I, registered on 25.06.1979, in the Office of the Sub-Registrar, Shivajinagar, Bangalore, in respect of the immovable property bearing No.374, PID No.71-9-374, Situated at **8th Main Sonnenahalli, Now known as VIVEKNAGAR, Layout,** Corporation No.71/115, Bangalore.

The under signed have purchased the same from Mrs.Aamina Muneer daughter of Mrs. Tara Muneer. She also lodge a complaint regarding the loss of the aforesaid original document, dated. 29.06.2012.

Any person finding the said original Sale Deed, may kindly return the same to the under signed at the below given address.

**Dr. MIR NAQHI RAZA.,**
No. 366, 4th Cross, 8th Main,
Viveknagar, Bangalore : 560 047.
Phone No. 9845215566

Bangalore Dated : 09-01-2022

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

This is to notify the General Public that my client Mr. A. KARUNA KARAN, entered into an Agreement of Sale for purchase of below mentioned property from its owner **Sri. BYRAREDDY .B,** Aged about 72 years, S/o. Late Byanna, R/at No. 48, 2nd Main, 3rd. Block, 3rd Stage, Basaveshwaranagar, Bengaluru - 560079.

Any person/s, banks, firms, financial sector/s, etc., having any claim, share, right or interest of any nature over the property, shall file his/her/their/its objections in writing along with original documents with the under signed within **TEN DAYS** from the date of this publication.

Any objections on and after **TEN days,** such objections shall not be entertained and my client will proceed with the transaction, presuming that there are no claim/s of anyone over the schedule property.

**SCHEDULE**

**Site No.1/1,** carved out of converted land in Sy. No. 3/1B (duly converted from agricultural to non-agricultural purpose vide O.M No. B.Dis.ALN.SR(S)58/2004-05 dtd: 29/05/2004, passed by Spl. Deputy Commissioner, Bengaluru District), situated at **MANAVARTHEKAVAL VILLAGE, Uttarahalli Hobli, Bengaluru South Taluk,** now comes under limits of BBMP measuring East to West: 80 ft. & North to South: 40 ft. and bounded on:

**East by : Road,** **West by : BDA Property,**
**North by : Site Nos. 1/2 and 1/3,** **South by : Site No.1**

**A.N. Krishna,** Advocate, #7, 2nd Floor, B.R. Ramu Building, Diagonal Road, V.V. Puram, Bengaluru-560004.

Place : Bengaluru Dated: 09/01/2022

**CITY UNION BANK LIMITED**
**Credit Recovery and Management Department**
**Administrative Office :** No. 24-B, Gandhi Nagar, Kumbakonam - 612 001. **E-Mail id :** crmd@cityunionbank.in, **Ph :** 0435-2432322, **Fax :** 0435-2431746

**POSSESSION NOTICE (Immovable Properties)**

Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of **City Union Bank Ltd.,** having its Administrative Office at **No.24-B, Gandhi Nagar, Kumbakonam - 612001** and one of the branch offices at **No.784, II Phase, 7th Block, Banashankari III Stage, 100 Ft Road, Bengaluru Urban - 560085** under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2)&(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice dated **17-08-2021** followed by Paper Publication dated **16-09-2021** calling upon the Borrowers **1) M/s. Bhavya Constructions, No.35/1, NCR Complex, 2nd Floor, 16th Cross, 8th Main, Malleswaram, Bangalore - 560003. 2) Mr. Mukesh Patel, S/o. Dayaljibhai Patel, No.1806/A, 3rd Cross, Opp. to Vijay ICQ, 9th Main, 3rd Stage, Prakash Nagar, Bangalore- 560021. 3) Mr. Ajit Anand Padte, S/o. Anant S. Padte, No.401, Devayani Comforts, 24B Cross, KR Road, Bangalore- 560070. 4) M/s. Bhavya Industries, No.41, 8th Cross, Goraguntepalya, Bangalore - 560022. 5) Mr. Gopalakrishna Bhat, S/o. Narayan Bhat, No.1806/A, 3rd Cross, 9th Main Road, Prakash Nagar, Srirampuram, Bangalore - 560021. 6) Mrs. P. Bhavya, W/o. Mukesh Patel, No.180/A, 3rd Cross, 9th Main, Prakash Nagar, Bangalore - 560021** to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being **Rs.2,05,57,932/- (Rupees Two Crore Five Lakh Fifty Seven Thousand Nine Hundred and Thirty Two Only)** within 60 days from the date of the said notice with subsequent interest thereon from **09-08-2021** with monthly rests.

The borrowers above named having failed to repay the amount despite the receipt of the above referred statutory notice, NOTICE is hereby given to the borrowers above named and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules on this **05th day of January 2022.**

The borrowers above named in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of City Union Bank Ltd., for an amount of **Rs.2,13,08,156/- (Rupees Two Crore Thirteen Lakh Eight Thousand One Hundred and Fifty Six Only)** and interest thereon from **11-11-2021** till the repayment of entire dues.

**The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.**

**Immovable Properties Mortgaged to our Bank**

**Property - 2: (Properties Owned by M/s. Bhavya Constructions)**

**Schedule - I:** All that Piece and Parcel of the Undeveloped Residential Property bearing Corporation No.3 & 4, PID No.100-217-3 & 4 (formerly site bearing House List No.3 & 4 Gramathana Khatha No.175 A & 188 A, formed out in Sy.No.33 of Geddadahalli Village, Kasaba Hobli, Bangalore North Taluk, situated at 60 ft. Road, Geddadahalli, Bangalore within the Limits of Ward No.100, Sanjaynagar Sub-Division, BBMP, measuring in all 4,828 Sq.ft. and bounded on the East by : Site No.1 & 2, West by : Road, North by : AECS Layout, South by : Road.

**Schedule - II:** 50% Share in Schedule - I Property, Schedule - III Property to be constructed Apartment bearing Adhoc No.102, I Floor, with Super Built-up Area of 1,730 Sq.ft., with UDS of 801 Sq.ft. along with one Car parking, Apartment bearing Adhoc No.201, II floor, with Super Built-up Area of 1,745 Sq.ft., with UDS of 808 Sq.ft. along with One Car Parking, Apartment bearing Adhoc No.202, II Floor, with Super Built-up Area of 1,730 Sq.ft., with UDS of 801 Sq.ft. along with One Car Parking.

**Place: Bengaluru, Date: 05-01-2022** **Authorised Officer**

**Regd. Office :** 149, T.S.R. (Big) Street, Kumbakonam, Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu - 612 001, **CIN -** L65110TN1904PLC001287, **Telephone No.** 0435-2402322, **Fax :** 0435-2431746, **Website :** www.cityunionbank.com

**CLASSIFIEDS**

CHANGE OF NAME

**CHANGE OF NAME**

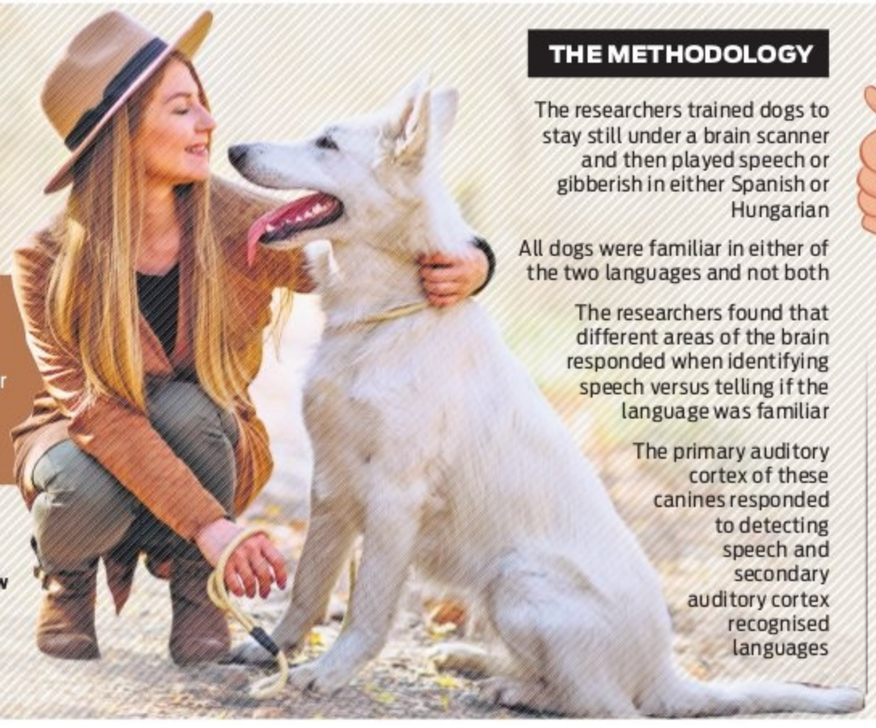
I, Kumari Ilaadevi Hegde Residing at No.406, Brigade Classic, Armugam circle, Basavanagudi, Bangalore -04 have changed my name from **ILAADEVI** to **ILAADEVI HEGDE** affidavit Dated 06/01/2022 Sworn Before Notary Mahesh J.J Bangalore.

For the first time in years, Víctor Escobar stopped taking most of the medicines needed for his lung disease. On Friday evening, he became the first Colombian to be euthanised despite not yet being in terminal condition. "I feel an immense tranquility. I don't feel fear of what is to come," Escobar said. He is the first to use a July ruling of nation's top court that changed the rules for euthanasia, allowing it to be applied to people who suffer intense physical or psychological suffering due to grave and incurable disease

EXFILE • RESEARCH

## *Dogs might be smarter than you think*

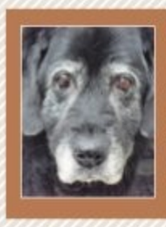
**If you started talking in gibberish to your dog, would it be able to spot it? Or, what if, all of sudden, you speak in a different language? Would your dog still be able to follow it? Recent study shows that dogs could tell speech and gibberish apart, and also recognise languages!**



**RECENT STUDY**

A team of researchers, led by ethologist Laura Cuaya, from the Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary has found for the first time that a non-human brain has the capability to differentiate between languages

Using brain scans of 18 dogs, the researchers found that these canines could distinguish between familiar and unfamiliar languages in addition to recognising the difference between speech and gibberish. The study was published in the journal 'NeuroImage'



**OLD IS GOLD**

The older doggos were able to differentiate languages much better than the younger ones; even though the younger ones were more adept at learning new tricks

**We know that people, even preverbal human infants, notice the difference [between various languages]. But maybe dogs do not bother. After all, we never draw our dogs' attention to how a specific language sounds**

Laura Cuaya, ethologist who led the research team

**THE METHODOLOGY**

The researchers trained dogs to stay still under a brain scanner and then played speech or gibberish in either Spanish or Hungarian

All dogs were familiar in either of the two languages and not both

The researchers found that different areas of the brain responded when identifying speech versus telling if the language was familiar

The primary auditory cortex of these canines responded to detecting speech and secondary auditory cortex recognised languages

**THE LITTLE PRINCE EXCERPTS**

The dogs were played bits from the 1943 children's book 'The Little Prince' in Spanish and Hungarian.

The same was also scrambled and played to analyse whether the dogs could distinguish speech from gibberish

**THE BEST COMPANION**

Dogs were probably domesticated around 20,000 to 40,000 years ago in Eurasia

Today, the most plausible hypothesis of dog evolution is that a group of less-aggressive wolves that lived close to humans could have fed off the refuse created by those hunter-gatherers

This relationship later developed into a mutually beneficial one and could have led to the evolution of dogs

**WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN**

While human brains are tuned for speech, we still do not know whether the same is true for dogs; they might be simply detecting the naturalness of the sound they hear

It is still not possible to conclude with cent per cent clarity that the cohabitation of dogs with humans might have helped them acquire the skill of recognising the languages

# Scientists off to Antarctica's 'doomsday' glacier

The place is 'hardest to get to' but team wants to unravel its mystery and how global warming will impact sea rise

CLIMATE CHANGE

A team of scientists is sailing to "the place in the world that's the hardest to get to" so they can better figure out how much and how fast seas will rise because of global warming eating away at Antarctica's ice.

Thirty-two scientists on Thursday are starting a more than two-month mission aboard an American research ship to investigate the crucial area where the massive but melting Thwaites glacier faces the Amundsen Sea and may eventually lose large amounts of ice because of warm water. The Florida-sized glacier has gotten the nickname the "doomsday glacier" because of how much ice it has and how much seas could rise if it all melts — more than two feet (65 centimeters) over hundreds of years. Because of its importance, the United States and the United Kingdom are in the midst of a joint $50 million mission to study Thwaites, the widest glacier in the world by land and sea. Not near any of the continent's research stations, Thwaites is on Antarctica's western half, east of the jutting Antarctic Peninsula, which used to be the area scientists worried most about.

"Thwaites is the main reason I would say that we have so large an uncertainty in the projections of future sea level rise and that is because it's a very remote area, difficult to reach," Anna Wahlin, an oceanographer from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, said Wednesday in an interview from the Research Vessel Nathaniel B. Palmer, which was scheduled to leave its port in Chile hours later. "It is configured in a way so that it's potentially unstable. And that is why we are worried about this."

Thwaites is putting about 50 billion tons of ice into the water a year. The British Antarctic Survey says the glacier is responsible for 4% of global sea rise, and the conditions leading to it to lose more ice are accelerating, University of Colorado ice scientist Ted Scambos said from the McMurdo land station last month.

*Oregon State University ice scientist Erin Pettit said Thwaites appears to be collapsing in three ways:*

*1. Melting from below by ocean water.*

*2. The land part of the glacier "is losing its grip" to the place it attaches to the seabed, so a large chunk can come off into the ocean and later melt.*

*3. The glacier's ice shelf is breaking into hundreds of fractures like a damaged car windshield.*

This is what Pettit said she fears will be the most troublesome with six-mile (10-kilometer) long cracks forming in just a year. No one has stepped foot on the key ice-water interface at Thwaites before. In 2019, Wahlin was on a team that explored the area from a ship using a robotic ship but never went ashore.

Wahlin's team will use two robot ships — her own large one called Ran which she used in 2019 and the more agile Boaty McBoatface, the crowdsource named drone that could go further under the area of Thwaites that protrudes over the ocean — to get under Thwaites. The ship-bound scientists will be measuring water temperature, the sea floor and ice thickness. They'll look at cracks in the ice, how the ice is structured and tag seals on islands off the glacier.

FACT OF THE MATTER

## Racing fast, driverless

TECH

A racecar with nobody at the wheel snaked around another to snatch the lead on an oval track at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas Friday in an unprecedented high-speed match between self-driving vehicles. Members of Italian-American team PoliMOVE cheered as their F-1 racecar, nicknamed "Minerva," repeatedly passed a rival entered by South Korean team Kaist. Minerva was doing nearly 185km per hour when it blew past the Kaist car, easily beating the top speed hoped for by race organizers. But every racer was deemed a winner by organisers who saw the real victory as the fact that self-driving algorithms could handle high-speed competition. The race pitted teams of students from around the world against one another to rev up the capabilities of self-driving cars, improving the technology.

## China's rover scans 1.03 km

SPACE

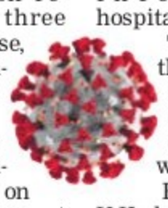
Yutu-2, the lander and rover of China's Chang'e 4 lunar probe which scripted history in 2019 when it made the first-ever soft landing on the far side of the moon, has travelled 1,003.9 metres of the region and captured an obscure intriguing image of a mysterious object, the official media reported on Saturday. The distance covered by Yutu-2, or Jade Rabbit-2, was 1,003.9 metres as of Thursday midnight, the Xinhua news agency reported, citing the Lunar Exploration and Space Programme Centre of the China National Space Administration. The Chang'e-4 probe, launched on December 8, 2018, made the first-ever soft landing on the Von Karman Crater in the South Pole-Aitken Basin on the far side of the moon on January 3, 2019. It has also sent back close-up images of the previously unexplored region.

# UK govt advisers against fourth Covid vaccine jab

HEALTH

LONDON: Even as cases rise around the world, the United Kingdom government advisers have recommended against giving a fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccine to nursing home residents and people over 80 because data shows that a third shot offers lasting protection against admission to the hospital.

For people over 65, protection against hospitalization remains at about 90% three months after the third dose, according to data compiled by the U.K. Health Security Agency.



As a result, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization on Friday advised the government that there was no need to offer a fourth dose, or second booster, to vulnerable people at this time. Instead, the government should focus on giving a third dose to as many people as possible to boost protection against the highly transmissible omicron variant.

'The current data show the booster dose is continuing to provide high levels of protection against severe disease, even for the most vulnerable older age groups,'' said Prof. Wei Shen Lim, the committee's chair. 'For this reason, the committee has concluded there is no immediate need to introduce a second booster dose, though this will continue to be reviewed.''

The U.K. is racing to offer booster shots to adults across the country after research showed that two doses were enough to protect people from omicron. The variant has fueled a surge in coronavirus infections and hospitalizations.

The number of people in the U.K. hospitalized with COVID-19 rose to 18,454 on Thursday, more than double the figure two weeks earlier.

Rising staff absences at U.K. hospitals have already prompted the military to provide backup to beleaguered doctors and nurses.

More than 39,000 staff members at hospitals in England were off work for reasons related to COVID-19 on Jan. 2, up 59% from the previous week, according to NHS England.

The respected trade publication, the Health Service Journal, said staff absences across the entire NHS, including mental health trusts and other areas, may be as high as 120,000.

CLIFFHANGER ON ICE

Susan Hill climbs on a rock wall covered with ice during Sandstone Ice Climbing festival at Robinson Ice Park, Minnesota | AFP

# China tests docking at space station

SPACE

BEIJING: Three Chinese astronauts in the core module of the country's under-construction space station have for the first time successfully completed the manual rendezvous and docking experiment with the Tianzhou-2 cargo craft, China's national space agency said on Saturday.

The astronauts in the core module teleoperated the Tianzhou-2 cargo craft to leave the front docking port of the core module's node cabin and move to the planed parking point, with the coordination of ground control engineers, state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported, citing the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA). After a short stay in the parking point, the cargo craft moved towards the space station complex and completed the rendezvous and docking by the teleoperation of astronauts.

The experiment took about two hours and was successfully completed at 7:55 a.m. (Beijing Time), the CMSA said. The experiment was the first time that the three Chinese astronauts, Zhai Zhigang, Ye Guangfu and Wang Yaping, used manual teleoperation equipment to operate the cargo craft and the space station to conduct rendezvous and docking, according to the *Xinhua* report.

## Japan billionaire eyes Mariana deep

EXPLORATION

Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa said Friday his trip into space had given him a new appreciation for Earth, and he now hopes to plunge into the ocean's forbidding Mariana Trench. Maezawa and his assistant Yozo Hirano spent 12 days on the International Space Station last month, where they documented life in space for one million YouTube subscribers. Speaking Friday after his return, Maezawa said the voyage had made him appreciate home even more. The ISS trip was only the first of the 46-year-old's planned space forays. He is already scheduled to take eight people on a 2023 mission around the moon, operated by Elon Musk's SpaceX. But he said he has another exploration in mind now as well. "Not only to go to the Moon, not just to travel upwards but also downwards is another dream of mine," he said. "I am thinking about going down to the Mariana Trench, deep under the ocean," he said. The Mariana Trench is the deepest place on Earth and has rarely been visited by humans. "I want to keep taking on challenges," Maezawa added.

CONSUMER CONNECT

# *Show of strength: Metaverse gets touch of reality at gala extravaganza*

VIRTUAL WORLD

LAS VEGAS: A jacket equipped with sensors that let wearers feel hugs or even punches in virtual reality was among the innovations giving the metaverse a more realistic edge at the Consumer Electronics Show. "What is the metaverse if you can't feel it?" asked Jose Fuertes, founder of the Spain-based startup Owo, which made the jacket. "It's just avatars."

The "metaverse" – a parallel universe where human, augmented and virtual realities are supposed to merge -- was a hot theme at the annual gadget extravaganza in Las Vegas, with startups showing off computers, headsets and other gear promising to enhance time spent in virtual worlds. Owo touts its jacket as able to immerse wearers, whether in video games or in the metaverse, letting them feel "a gunshot, the wind, someone grabbing your arm and even a hug from a loved one."

The tight-fitting jacket features bands that stick to the skin, with sensors that sync to a mobile application. Before donning a virtual reality (VR) headset, the wearer can choose the intensity of each sensation. "Our mission is to turn the virtual into reality with a second skin; to add the sense of touch in the metaverse or video games," Fuertes said.

The Owo garb – to be priced less than $450 when it hits the market late this year -- brings to mind the sci-fi novel-turned-film "Ready Player One," in which people in a dystopian world live alternate lives in a virtual universe. The science fiction future seems distant given a lack of full body suits and comfortable headsets for

simulated experiences, or ubiquitous high-speed internet service to handle such rich data streams. Nonetheless, the metaverse has become a popular topic since being endorsed by Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg so enthusiastically that the technology company was renamed "Meta."

**Sound of inevitability?**

Virtual reality has mostly been used for video games, despite its potential for experiences such as letting people visit museums, landmarks or far-off cities while sitting at home, and even for providing seats literally in the middle of feature films.

While companies such as Meta and HTC have invested heavily in virtual reality headsets, the equipment is still not light and comfortable enough to wear for long periods of time. "I'm the biggest sort of augmented and virtual reality nerd, but I don't think we are anywhere close to anything exciting happening in the metaverse," said Paddy Cosgrave, head of Web Summit in Europe. He expects it to take more than a decade for the metaverse to become real.

"Nothing can stop it," Touchcast chief and founder Edo Segal said of the metaverse. Touchcast showed off a platform for collaboration between companies in virtual reality, complete with ".metaverse" addresses akin to .com web addresses. But the domains will be registered on a blockchain database, instead of on servers.

"In 1999, it was hard to believe people would buy things online," Segal said. "Look where we are today. Humanity is moving in this direction." Industry trackers report that sales of virtual reality gear were boosted by the pandemic as people relied on the internet for games, work, learning and socializing.